'THE MUSICAL PILGRIM'

Edited by Dr. Arthur Somervell

An Introduction to the Music of R. Vaughan Williams

by A. E. F. Dickinson

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'THE MUSICAL PILGRIM'

General Editor *Dr. Arthur Somervell*

An Introduction to the Music of R. Vaughan Williams

BY

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TO

H. P. ALLEN

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 5
PRELIMINARIES 12
'A SEA SYMPHONY' 14
TRANSITIONAL WORK 28
'ON WENLOCK EDGE' 28
'HUGH THE DROVER' 30
'A LONDON SYMPHONY' 32
'PASTORAL SYMPHONY' 51
MASS IN G MINOR 67
'THE SHEPHERDS OF THE DELECTABLE MOUNTAINS' 70
'SANCTA CIVITAS' 72
MISCELLANEOUS 80
A SUMMARY 81
GRAMOPHONE RECORDS 84

INTRODUCTION

From a survey of literary history Wordsworth once observed that all great and original work has to create the taste for its enjoyment. He could have deduced the same from the history of music. The works of Bach have taken about two centuries to win their due recognition, and the masterpieces of our Tudor composers are hardly known even by name. For these and other reasons many readers may have been led actually to expect, in an age of organized appreciation, some sort of preliminary pamphlet on the writer of *A London Symphony*, whose name commands wide respect but hardly an appreciable public. This handbook, however, is not meant to be a pamphlet. It is an attempt to present, first and foremost, the facts about Vaughan Williams's music, in so far as they are unable to speak for themselves to people not yet made congenial by temperament or training; an attempt, also, to present the facts in relation and in proportion; to single out the essential characteristics from the occasional mannerisms, and thus exhibit the gradual fusion of individual works into one musical personality. In estimating the significance of a work—by omission as well as by much attention—I have not asked 'Do I admire it?' so much as 'Is it characteristic of the composer's mind as a whole?' Only, I must confess that a close and continual study of Vaughan Williams's development has led me to assume that that *is* best which is most characteristic. And before proceeding to the facts, I am going to venture on a few suggestions as to Vaughan Williams's claims to general attention.

First, he is one of the most downright composers that ever lived. At every stage of his work he has shown his determination to speak plainly, in both senses of the word, and to speak about something fundamental. He chose London and the country, or Walt Whitman and the Bible, as his 'subjects', because he felt he could sincerely concentrate upon them all the vital experience at his command. His continual revision of past work is the sign, not of a low standard of past achievement, but of an increasing determination to know himself—which, after all, is the chief business of living. He has thus, in general, not only meant what he said, but also said what he meant. The absence in his music of every form of rhetorical address, of all those 'effects' which are really so monotonously ineffective, is the expression not of incompetence but of the belief that every individual conception must have its own unique presentation. He has his mannerisms, but they never distract the listener from the essence of what he has to say.

Secondly, he speaks (whether he likes it or not) to the twentieth century. Purposive address is an essential quality of art. It is an address to an ideal audience, not to any actual audience, nor, again, to the class of audience which an outworn and out-of-date phrase stigmatizes as 'the gallery'. But if it is true, as a thoughtful writer has maintained,[1] that 'the passion of the artist is dimmed by the leagues and the years', then it is for the ideal audience of the present that Vaughan Williams's music is most clearly meant. The

[1] Mr. R. Capell, whose outline of the historical perspective in which English composers found themselves at the turn of the century, I have found most suggestive. (See *Music and Letters*, April and October, 1926.)

present age, rudely shaken out of its complacent self by the War, and by all the hidden forces let loose by the War and now at large, is an age of fierce and purposeless sensationalism, but also of fierce and purposive idealism. And I feel, though I cannot prove, that Vaughan Williams's music is likely to make a special appeal to the men and women of fierce ideals, to the explorers, to the people whose experience in the last ten or twelve years has taught them the grave danger of playing for safety, whether in art or in the ordinary walks of life. Moreover, for those who, reacting from the crude sensationalism of the day, are trying to refit their minds for the more permanent ecstasies of the emotions felt, or at any rate crystallized, in tranquillity—for these Vaughan Williams can present, with the freshness of a vital experience, the eternal beauty of nature (the Pastoral Symphony and *The Lark ascending*), or the eternal romance of spiritual adventure (*Toward the Unknown Region*, *A Sea Symphony*, *The Shepherds of the Delectable Mountains*, *Sancta Civitas*), or the outlook which will give new life to common things (*On Wenlock Edge*, *Hugh the Drover*, and, technically, the Mass in G minor). No doubt, some people will prefer Elgar or Holst for spiritual adventure, Delius or Bax for quiet beauty, Ireland for homely strains. Of all living composers, however, Vaughan Williams appears to me to provide the most consistently what is solid and refreshing.

But I am prepared to go further, and to maintain that he makes a special appeal to Englishmen, not only of this but of all generations. I find in his music a most living expression of certain recognized features of English national character, and of English musical tradition in particular.

By national character I mean, not the character of individuals who are taken as average specimens of the nation, but the character of the nation as a composite whole—its inherited ideals. It is in this sense that our national character contains so much for which we have to thank not the majority of Englishmen, past or present, but rather a few notable personalities. In this way the sentiment 'Back to Nature', which was fostered in this country by the Romantic poets from William Collins onwards, may now be said to be a national affair. In spite of Wireless, *thés dansants*, and the growing interest of a Baby Austin, we may observe an increasing reaction against modern 'civilization', or (in plainer words) against urbanization, in favour of the simpler, yet richer, life of the countryside. The rush to view the eclipse of 1927 provided an interesting example of this general movement, after all allowances for the tyranny of the stunt-press.

It is characteristic of the lateness of musical development in England—after its almost complete cessation with the death of Henry Purcell—that Vaughan Williams has appeared a century later than Wordsworth. But whatever the incidence of naturalism in this connexion, there is no doubt that in providing two 'nature' Symphonies out of the three he has written, and in developing the theme of the open road from *Songs of Travel* onwards, Vaughan Williams has been voicing a sentiment which is highly congenial to our national temperament. Moreover, in the eighteenth century the love of nature meant the love of simplicity: the blood began to quicken anew at the sorrows of a homeless mouse or emmet, or at the beauty of the meanest flower that blows. 'Greatness is to take the common things of life and walk truly among them'

might have been the new motto. From this point in our national outlook, it is notable that Vaughan Williams has taken his words from R. L. Stevenson, A. E. Housman, Walt Whitman (several times), John Bunyan, and the English Bible; that his harmony and orchestration are often of surprising simplicity; and that his melodies have a way of echoing English folk-song, without the quaintness of that archaic language. By the same process of argument I would declare as un-English the incense-laden atmosphere of *The Apostles*, the equally perfumed lusciousness of *On hearing the first cuckoo in Spring*, and the Oriental tinge of *The Hymn of Jesus*. Sincere as these works are, they stir no ' recollection ', no answering vibration of the mind, amongst Englishmen as a whole. Finally, bluntness of statement, which I have attributed to Vaughan Williams, is an offshoot of the insularity which is the joke of our more polite neighbours. While Elgar was content, in many respects, to follow the Wagner tradition, Vaughan Williams (supported by Holst, and independently by Delius) thought better of it, and started a new, or at least a new traditional, line.

This brings us to the affinity between Vaughan Williams's music and the purely musical side of our national inheritance. With the advent of Handel in this country, all native music was choked for nearly two centuries, the exceptions proving the rule. It was inevitable, however, that there should be a reaction, and we may regard the work of Parry and Stanford, with Holst and Vaughan Williams in their train, as a partly deliberate and partly instinctive attempt to throw off the German orchestral yoke and revert to a more English way of speaking. Naturally enough, in the absence of any intervening period of distinction

(Purcell and Blow being, perhaps, too full of the mannerisms of their time to be of much help), our revivalists went to the Elizabethans for their inspiration; the Romantic poets, reacting from the heavy metal of imitation-Miltonese, made the same choice. Now, the features of Elizabethan music which attracted Parry and his School were that it was choral, and that it was individually so, being easily distinguishable from the continental styles of the time by the incisiveness and variety of its rhythm and general texture, these qualities having their counterpart in the unfailing sparkle and metrical versatility of Elizabethan lyric. It was therefore not a coincidence that the most original and refreshing work of Parry and Stanford was choral rather than orchestral, and lyrical rather than dramatic. Nor, I fancy, was it a coincidence that Vaughan Williams started his career by 'collecting' English folk-songs and editing *The English Hymnal*;[1] or that his early compositions were chiefly vocal, his first Symphony a choral one, and his first Opera choral rather than orchestral in form. Further, his choral style is no more like Parry's than like Gibbons's, except for a certain homely robustness which all three composers exhibit in common. It is extraordinarily English, but it is also extraordinarily Vaughan Williams.

I have tried to give a plain account of those qualities which I find most striking in Vaughan Williams's music as a whole. We may now turn to individual works,

[1] To which he himself contributed *Sine Nomine* ('For all the Saints'), whose splendour seems undiminished by familiar use, and the serenely beautiful *Down Ampney* ('Come down, O Love divine'). Lately, Vaughan Williams has helped to edit *Songs of Praise* and *The Oxford Carol Book* (Oxford University Press). The former collection includes his stirring 'old' tune, *Kings Weston*, of which he has also composed a special 'festival' setting.

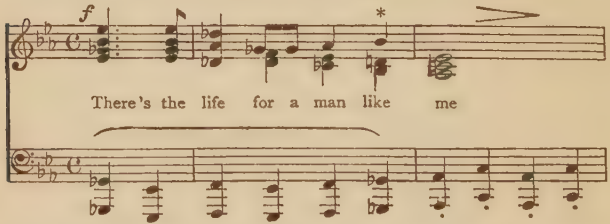
which we may conveniently consider in three successive groups. In the first, of which *A Sea Symphony* is a noble summary, the composer was finding his *métier*. In the second, typified by *On Wenlock Edge*, he was experimenting. In the last, which I have taken upon me to label as his mature period, he has worked more confidently. To this period belong the London and Pastoral Symphonies, the Mass in G minor, and *Sancta Civitas*. I have not yet (1927) observed any signs of a fourth period. Even the uncompromising sounds of the more recent *Concerto Accademico for violin and strings* [1] constitute no essential change in the composer's general style.

[1] First performed in November 1925, but not published till two years later (Oxford University Press).

PRELIMINARIES

A few of Vaughan Williams's early works are worth a note. They are more familiar to most listeners than the later work, and they are both individual and attractive, to my mind, in spite of the distance which separates them from the mature work.

In *Songs of Travel* (R. L. Stevenson), published in 1905 by Boosey, Vaughan Williams showed, in the first place, that keen sympathy with the spirit and form of English poetry which has always distinguished our really native composers. The songs, in fact, all have atmosphere, although the musical texture is comparatively commonplace. There is an undoubted individuality, for instance, about the pleasantly discordant



in *The Vagabond*, the last chord but one being destined for characteristic use later. The composer seems, indeed, to have found more congenial material in the quaint 'conceits' of the Caroline poet George Herbert, whose words he has taken in *Five Mystical Songs*,[1] a delicate example of real mysticism. But these songs were written some years later.

In the *Fantasia on Christmas Carols*, for baritone

[1] Stainer & Bell.

solo, chorus and orchestra,[1] Vaughan Williams added a personal touch to some fine old Church-tunes,[2] making some interesting experiments in choral expression by his use of the chorus (when it hums and 'ah's) as a wordless commentary on the narrative, in the same way that instrumental expression has habitually been employed since the days of Bach and Handel. And the fine originality of *Toward the Unknown Region* (chorus and orchestra)[3] gave a promising sanction to an alliance between Vaughan Williams and Walt Whitman which matured in *A Sea Symphony* and is still justifying its existence.[4] Hardly less characteristic is the racy, perhaps Attic, wit of the Overture to incidental music for Aristophanes' *Wasps*.[5]

[1] Published 1912, but hardly 'transitional' (Stainer & Bell).

[2] A personal touch never absent from Vaughan Williams's numerous settings of separate folk-tunes. By his characteristic and *singularly* appropriate treatment of this 'common' material, he has made it his own, just as Bach made so many of the Chorales his own that we always think of them all in Bachian terms. It is only a step, then, from Vaughan Williams's direct use of folk-song to the complete assimilation of folk-idiom, with its attendant atmosphere of 'breezy good-fellowship', which has permanently enriched his musical speech and, even in its most modern guise, endowed his work with a natural, primeval feeling, the more universal for being so intensely homely—like the novels of Thomas Hardy.

[3] Revised edition (1918) published by Stainer & Bell.

[4] In *Three Settings of Walt Whitman* (Oxford University Press, 1925).

[5] Curwen.

A SEA SYMPHONY[1]

For soprano and baritone soli, chorus and orchestra. In four movements. Words selected from poems by Walt Whitman. (1903–10.)

This work may not possess the masterly unity of the two later Symphonies, but its importance cannot be overlooked. Besides being the first completely choral Symphony ever written—Beethoven's being three parts orchestral—it summarizes the composer's development up to date (which, it has been suggested, is not without distinction), and it expands it on the elaborate scale we should expect of a Symphony.

The general design is purely musical. The words fill their proper place in a scheme which embraces a whole chorus and orchestra. They give a clue to the intention of the music; they are not intended to supply the thread on which the whole musical development depends. But if the general sequence of the first three movements is clear to anybody used to the conventions of a classical Symphony, the failure of the last movement to balance the first, in any manner recognized by those conventions, may prompt the average listener to fall back upon the words and ask what the general 'meaning' of the Symphony is, with reference to which the connexion between the various movements may be explained. A prosaic analysis of the words provides, I think, an answer to the question:

I. 'Behold, the sea itself.' Limitless, indomitable. And not less indomitable the sailors, the 'unnamed heroes . . . whom fate can never surprise nor death dismay'. Here, indeed, man is 'elate above death'. There is a universal flag waving for all time over all seas, all ships, to proclaim this.

[1] Originally published by Breitkopf & Härtel. Revised edition (1918) published by Stainer & Bell.

II. So, to the philosophic mind the sea is a vast symbol of all human life.

III. (Descriptive digression.) Look at it! That wonderful panorama of a myriad waves, following the great ship as ceaselessly as they are displaced by it.

IV. *Now I begin to see the meaning of it all.* These restless explorations will lead to a Reality of some kind. 'The true son of God shall come singing his songs.'

'We too take ship, O Soul . . . chanting our chant of pleasant exploration.

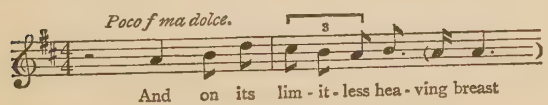
'Away O Soul! . . . steer for the deep waters only . . . where mariner has not yet dared to go . . . O daring joy, but safe! Are they not all the seas of God? O farther, farther, farther sail!'

If this is anything like the right interpretation—and Walt Whitman is, as usual, very direct in these poems—then the last movement balances not the first movement but the first three movements. In the hackneyed phrase, it is the climax of the Symphony, to which all the former movements lead up.

Thematically, the Symphony is held together by three *leit-motifs*, each of which the composer may or may not intend to be connected with a literary idea. They are as follows:

(α) A harmonic progression, consisting of a minor chord resolving on the major chord of the note a major third higher, which begins the first movement, is developed in a new setting in the second, and is referred to in the third. It appears to illustrate the restless, indomitable side of the sea. Perhaps it is excluded from the last movement because the subject of that movement is the restless soul, not the restless sea.

(β) A melodic line



which is developed in the first and last movements. In the first movement it does not seem to mean anything in particular. In the last movement it is clearly one of the ecstatic chants on the voyage to the Unknown.

(γ) A melodic contour (to the importance of which the composer did not, for some reason or another, call attention in the programme-note which he himself supplied for public performance. Perhaps the recurrence of this Plainsong-like *motif* is mere homogeneity of style; but it is well worth noting in any case):

This is prominent in the first, second, and fourth movements. In the first and last movements it appears to present the breezy, ' dashing ' side of seas and souls. In the second movement it has been calmed into serenity —observe the vital flattening of the fifth note—but the thought of the great panorama of existence, which the sea symbolizes, arouses the *motif* back to energetic life (the tone being restored in both senses).

There is no key-system between the movements, except that E flat, the key of the last movement, is clearly associated with the middle and most vital section of the slow movement, and that G major, the key in which the climax of the *finale* (i.e. of the Symphony) is realized, is triumphantly stated in the final climax of the *Scherzo*. Apart from the fact that hardly one listener in a hundred would know whether the keys of the first and last movements of a Symphony were identical, it is difficult to maintain that the classical convention, which preserves this identity, is an absolute law of good form. Certainly in this Symphony, where

the last movement looks forward from the first, any gesture which suggested a return to the starting-point would be out of place.

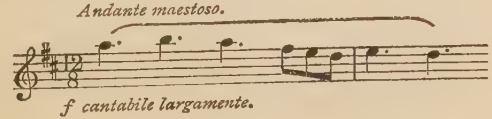
Structurally each movement is symphonic in type (like the Brahms Requiem) except where the clear and constructive thought of the words makes anything like a formal recapitulation a hindrance to the main expression. Thus, the second movement, being mainly contemplative, and the third movement, being purely descriptive, each embody a musical design in which 'development' is balanced by a plain and thorough return to the opening matter. In the first and last movements, in which the words supply a continuous train of thought (in spite of the number of different poems used), there is the minimum of balance by musical repetition. The artistic rightness of these formal distinctions is striking when one considers the poverty and ineptness of musical design which so many choral works, since Brahms, have exhibited.

We may now consider the movements in turn.

I. *A Song for all seas, all ships*

This movement falls roughly into three parts—the exposition of the themes, their development, and their recapitulation—but for reasons indicated above only the first Subject is formally repeated.

'Behold, the sea itself'. The delivery of *leit-motif* *a* plunges us into the refreshing surge of the first and principal Subject, given out here (and a good deal elsewhere) by the orchestra alone:



Dovetailed into it is *leit-motif* β, at which the voices join in. A quickening of the time at the words ' See the *steamers* ' discovers in the bass of the orchestra, and subsequently in the violins, a new and lively theme

which is destined for dramatic importance later. I can see no reason for its introduction here, except to make the listener familiar with its outline.

A brief and intense recapitulation of the opening bars, and we find ourselves in a new and ruder atmosphere, a gruff, bustling passage in the lower strings (in a new key and mode) heralding the entrance of the baritone solo with the words ' To-day a rude, brief recitative of ships sailing the seas ' and a tune which is characterized by *leit-motif* γ and the Aeolian mode. Its development by the chorus into a strenuous piece of realism—you can almost *feel* the drenching spray—leads even more abruptly into the lyrical beauty of the 'chant for the sailors of all nations ', which provides the more human element of the movement and also concludes the main melodic material.

The *Development*, marked by the entrance of the soprano solo, starts with a reference to the opening bars and proceeds to work with 1. The soprano solo takes it up in an emotionalized form, and with this new form of it the chorus develop the idea of the ' one flag above all the rest ' to a climax which falls, as it were, into the intensely personal commemoration of all the heroes of the sea, underlined by a serene and extremely beautiful re-presentation of 2 in the key of the move-

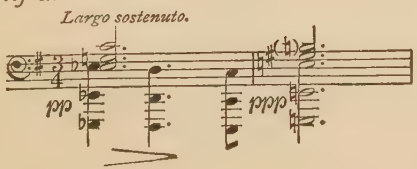
ment. (How much more real all this is than in 1910!) Finally, the victory of 'man elate above death' is celebrated in the breathless fugal development of a theme based on the third bar of 2, the orchestra discovering a vigorous counter-subject in 2 itself.

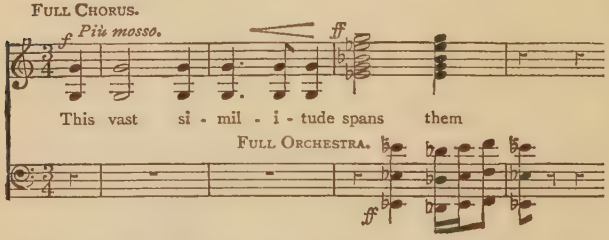
The shouting gradually dies away. With the words 'A pennant universal' the formal recapitulation of the principal Subject, in the original key, is effected. In conclusion, we return to 'the sea itself', and after a suggestion of α and β, in the orchestra, the chorus gather together for a few bars of very quiet peroration.

The 'harmony' of this movement is not very interesting, but there are flashes of individuality (apart from the consecutive fifths in the 'upper' parts), particularly in the *Development*.

II. *On the Beach at Night alone*

In this movement the sea is presented more subjectively, as a background to the main thought. That thought is too mystifying to find plain utterance in words at once, and even when such utterance has been found, the mystery still clings to the mind. So, the orchestra have a good deal to say by themselves at the beginning and end of this movement (the harmony being of the right, inconclusive kind), and what they say at the end corresponds closely to what they say at the beginning—'on the beach—at night—alone'—the thoughts of the lonely visionary.

The principal orchestral theme is a brooding version of *leit-motif* α.

There is an auxiliary theme, marked by a rising scale of four notes.

When the 'thought of the clef of the universe' has been announced, the key changes to E flat, and the horns give out what appears to be a new tune until we notice its strong affinity with *γ*. It is accompanied by an even, descending figure in the bass, which persists for some little time. The vision of humanity begins to quicken. ('Though inland far we be . . .' is the feeling.) The orchestra reiterate *γ* in its original form; the chorus speak as one man. At last the great moment comes; the avoidance of all rhetorical display makes its presentation all the more effective.

The dream passes into the infinite, whence it came. We are back on the beach alone, less consciously aware of the sea than before (the chorus do not sing in the Recapitulation). Yet the dream has not quite vanished. A shadow of 'recollection' returns, in the form of the exquisite horn-tune, *ppp* (the horns being muted).

III. *Scherzo. The Waves*

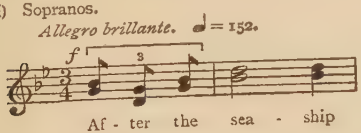
A flash from the visible world (recalling the first chord of the Symphony) shatters all dreams that ever were. We awaken to the sight and sound of the bubbling, gurgling sea.

As I have already explained, the lack of any 'argument' in the poem here set to music necessitates a coherent design on purely musical lines. The movement, in fact, is in a carefully constructed three-part form—practically 'Sonata' form.

Part I. *Exposition.* The material of the first Subject tends in ceaseless flow, like its physical counterpart. But we may pick out, at any rate,

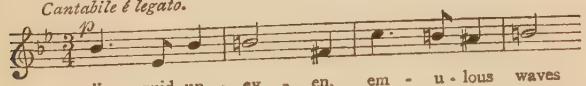
(i) Sopranos.

Allegro brillante. ♩ = 152.



(ii) Altos.

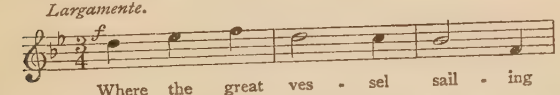
Cantabile é legato.



After the elusive character of all the various *motifs* presented (including α, and a hint of *The Golden Vanity*[1]), the well-defined contour of the second Subject, in the highly orthodox key of the relative major—

Sopranos and Tenors.

Largamente.

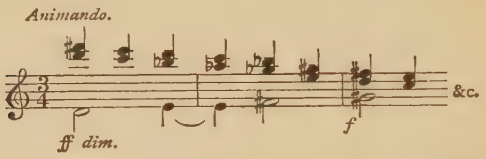


is very striking and reassuring. It has the bracing character of Parry's best subjects.

Part II. *Development.* The music having quieted down a little, the first Subject (i) returns, a mention of other matter from it, and finally an orchestral restatement of (ii). 'And many fragments'. The upper

[1] See p. 27.

part of the orchestra rushes down the whole-tone scale while the lower part stalks up it—a graphic use of atonality—



and then the tumult dies down to *ppp*, to awaken immediately at the first chord of the Recapitulation, as in the transition from the slow movement to the present one.

Part III. Only the first Subject (i) and the second Subject (in the tonic major) are recapitulated. There is not ' time ' for too much reflection. There is a short and brilliant Coda (or final Development), recalling the end of the Gloria of Beethoven's Mass in D in the electrical abruptness of its conclusion.

The whole harmonic and orchestral colour of this movement is very interesting. It is descriptive enough to be easily understood. It is expressive enough to make a really personal impression.

IV. *The Explorers*

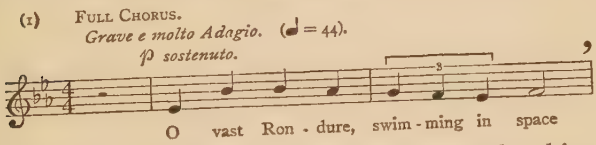
This is altogether the longest and most complex movement of the Symphony. The spirit of ' restless exploration ' has taken hold of the composer and carried him, possibly, further than he could control. There is a feeling at times, as so often in Schubert, that the main thread has been lost. But that, after all, is just how an explorer does feel (see Hugh Walpole's novel *Fortitude*). And there is a great surge about this movement which carries us breathlessly from one adventure to the

next, while the striking originality of many a daring episode points to this *finale* as so far the strongest and most individual expression of Vaughan Williams's genius.

The movement falls into two parts. The first is concerned with the expression of man's 'obstinate questionings of sense and outward things'—to quote a rather more familiar poem than *Passage to India*, which supplies the actual words. The second part deals with the voyage into the unknown which the spirit of restless exploration inspires.

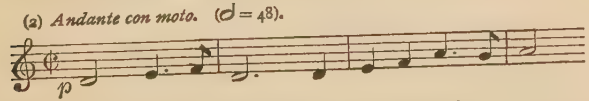
In the first part there are, musically, two motives:

1. An expansive, all-embracing theme (used, in a very different sense, in the Overture to *The Wasps*):



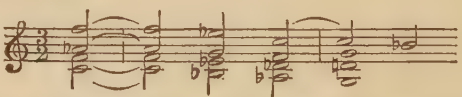
The composer, I gather, would have us consider this as a development of *leit-motif* β; but how many listeners would ever make the connexion, even as regards the triplet? The theme is fittingly expanded to illustrate the idea of the infinity of creation, which leads, as in the eighth Psalm, to the thought of man, and so to

2. A melody with the rugged strength of antiquity—it is in the Dorian mode—the kind of elemental strength which Plato seems to have admired when he set his approval on the Greek mode of that name:



This accompanies the thought of primitive man and his feverish questionings, before being developed with

the idea 'the first intent *remains*'. These feverish questionings are made concrete and actual in the shape of a distant choir of sopranos (sixteen voices in four-part harmony), an occurrence which calls for critical comment on two points. First, the effect of a distant or hidden choir had been used strikingly in Opera by Wagner, and was later exploited by Rutland Boughton in *The Immortal Hour*, but I fancy this is the first use apart from the stage. It has since been employed, with increasing significance, by Vaughan Williams,[1] and by Holst in *Neptune*. (I confess to a certain sense of the unearthly whenever I hear an invisible choir, and I am sure that the organ owes its wide popularity partly to its general invisibility.) Further, the sequence of fourths used here

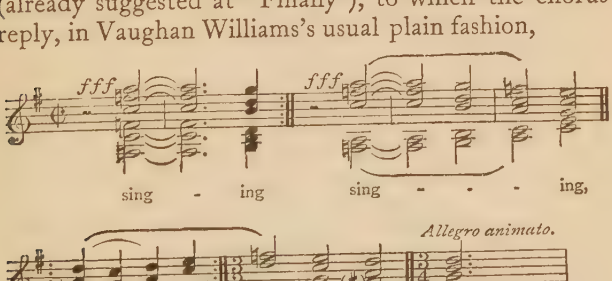


is notable for its originality—in spite of certain suggestions made in that direction by Bach and Beethoven—and also for its anticipation of the composer's later manner.

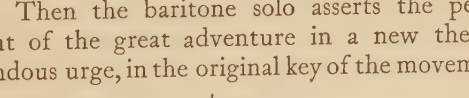
'Perhaps even now the time has arrived'—for those primitive longings to be vindicated. *Leit-motif γ* is suggested at this point in a plainly insistent rhythm. 'Finally'—this word is declaimed in a manner which recalls, for melodic reasons, the end of the *Scherzo*—'the true son of God shall come singing his songs'. This is the climax to which the whole Symphony has been tending, comparable to the *Proclaim ye the everlasting Gospel* of *The Apostles*. The first theme of the movement is delivered emphatically by the lower, and

[1] Cf. pp. 71, 74.

then by the upper, brass, while the chorus take up a subject suggested by it[1] with an ecstatic energy which echoes the similar development of 'Emblem of man' in the first movement; the orchestra underlining the comparison a little later by recalling the final setting of those words, in its terrifically emphatic ascending phrase (already suggested at 'Finally'), to which the chorus reply, in Vaughan Williams's usual plain fashion,

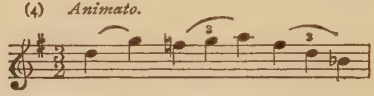


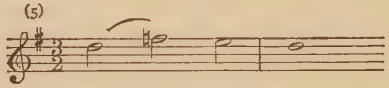
With that divine incentive, the explorer sets sail, and musically all is a 'development'. First, the orchestra take up β in a new rhythm, introducing some striking chords (forestalling the composer's later style). Then the baritone solo asserts the personal element of the great adventure in a new theme of tremendous urge, in the original key of the movement—



The soprano solo follows close. In the eminently

[1] It is notable that the same subject is used for the *Christe Eleison* in the Mass.

characteristic musical dialogue which ensues—now rapturous, now serene, but always impassioned—two musical threads may be distinguished. The first

is a development of γ; the second



resembles β. The melodic character of γ, in its plainer form, is also emphasized. Finally β ushers in, first, a short reappearance of the chorus (sometimes omitted in performance) and then, after a revival of 3 by the baritone solo, the final plunge into the unknown—'Away, O Soul!' In the splendid abandonment of this passage it is captious to pick out any theme; but some listeners may detect the influence of γ, which is certainly implicit in the orchestral phrase accompanying the subsequent 'Sail forth' and taken up by the solo voices. Later, the developed version of γ already noted (No. 4) begins to be prominent, also No. 5. These two are heard together at the momentous reiteration of *Steer for the deep waters only*.

'Sail forth'. The chord of D is pronounced again and again by the orchestra—to emphasize the self-committal of the soul's decision?—and is followed by an equally dramatic moment of silence. Then with the quiet introduction of 3 by the violins, in the key of the movement, there begins the short but wonderfully satisfying Coda, which seems, in the tranquillity of philosophical reflection, to summarize the whole adventure past—or is it the glimpse of the infinite, at

last attained? The reappearance of β points us back. The un-final last chord implies that *the best is yet to be.*

The stark but fundamental simplicity of these last few bars is ideally suited to Walt Whitman and is typical of the composer's 'English' hatred of anything like a rhetorical peroration. We shall observe an equally quiet conclusion to the *London*, and to every movement of the *Pastoral*, Symphony.

(Since these notes were completed, the following folk-song incident, occurring in the *Scherzo*, has been pointed out to me by Mr. Michael Mullinar.

When the chorus come in with the words 'laughing and buoyant' (vocal score, p. 65), the orchestra play, across the triple rhythm of the bar, the first four bars of *The Golden Vanity* (*Motherland Song Book*, volume iv [1]). Similarly, when the choir sing 'surface', on the next page, the orchestra strike up the opening bars of *The bold Princess Royal* (*Folk Songs from the Eastern Counties* [2]), repeating them at page 67, line 2. They also play the last phrase of the same folk-tune, in the second and following bars of line 3.

The interest of these interpolations is that one would scarcely notice them as such. So completely has Vaughan Williams mastered the secret of 'talking folk-song as to the manner born' that when he quotes a particular folk-tune, we feel he might have written it himself.)

[1] Stainer & Bell. [2] Novello.

TRANSITIONAL WORK

Between the completion of *A Sea Symphony* and the War, Vaughan Williams wrote a number of works which are interesting in themselves and well worth hearing. In the light, however, of subsequent events these works may be regarded as experiments in musical method rather than as actual achievements. And considerations of space preclude more than a summary mention in this handbook.

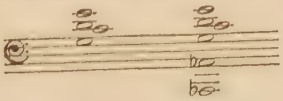
In the Fantasia on a theme of Tallis for double string orchestra and solo-strings,[1] *The Lark ascending* (solo violin and small orchestra or, alternatively, violin and piano[2]), and the Phantasy Quintet (1914),[3] the composer handles the strings with new and delicate effect. One may also note the 'fine, careless rapture' of the solo violin in *The Lark*, and the significance of the viola-writing in the Quintet, which is also a good plain example for the study of the composer's harmonic development.

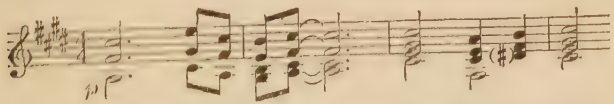
On Wenlock Edge, however, is the most satisfactory piece of this transitional period. It is a cycle of six songs for tenor voice, with accompaniment for piano 'and string quartet (ad lib.)', the words being taken from *A Shropshire Lad*.[4] The coincidence of two facts, that this work secured the composer his first welcome in Paris, and that it was the first work he produced after taking lessons with Ravel, led to the very doubtful notion that it was impregnated with Ravel. Except for a certain subtlety of colour, there is nothing of Ravel's technique in the work. Indeed, it is singularly English,

1 Curwen.
2 Oxford University Press.
3 Stainer & Bell.
4 Boosey. There is also an arrangement for full orchestra.

both in its 'Nordic' individualism[1] and in its natural affinity with the native tongue of English folk-song. It marks a very happy alliance between the composer and A. E. Housman, which has lately been renewed, with *Last Poems*, in *Seven Songs for voice and violin.*

A few technical features may be noted. The first song, which gives its title to the cycle, is characterized by two chords, the first included in the second



of which the possibilities were developed systematically later.[2] The harmony of No. 2 is very interesting. Here is a striking instance of common chords fitted into a new context—

No. 3 has the grit of the Dorian mode, previously noticed, with enough chromaticism to make it personal instead of merely primitive. No. 4 is a plainer and more attractive instance of this modal-chromatic writing. No. 5, *Bredon Hill*, is subtle compared with most of the many settings of the familiar poem, but rather heavy when put beside George Butterworth's. The end of No. 6, *Clun*, is a wonderfully simple suggestion of the infinite distance which separates man from the end of life.

[1] For the elaboration of the racial basis underlying the distinction between the sociable Frenchman and the independent Englishman, see Chapter XVI of *The Group Mind*, by William McDougall.

[2] Cf. pages 34, 56, 66, 75.

With *On Wenlock Edge* we may couple *Four Hymns for Tenor Solo*[1] (accompanied by piano and viola, or string quintet), a development in a sense of the rather earlier *Five Mystical Songs*.

There remain for discussion two other works written in this period, the Opera *Hugh the Drover* and *A London Symphony*. Of these the Symphony was revised after the War, and in any case presents a style so much nearer to that of the Pastoral Symphony that it may be reserved for the fuller examination due to mature work. *Hugh the Drover* was also, I imagine, completed after the War, its first performance being in 1924; but it contains so much of the composer's earlier style that it may fairly be accorded a more summary note than a full-sized Opera might seem to demand.

Hugh the Drover, then, is ' a Romantic Ballad Opera in two Acts ', with words by Harold Child.[2] To some extent it invites classification as an attempt at National Opera. The dramatic setting is essentially English (a small Cotswold town during the Napoleonic wars); there is a background of folk-song, and plenty of chorus-work for the ' folk '; above all, the main theme, ' a simple life and a free one for me', is, as we have already noted, eminently characteristic of the English temperament. But *Hugh the Drover*, like *Die Meistersinger* and *Boris Godounov*, is a good deal more than National Opera. It is, surely, another chant of pleasant exploration. Here the explorers are concrete, as is inevitable, and the path they pursue is the well-trodden course of the love that runs far from smooth; in short, the whole thought moves on a more conventional plane than the Finale of *A Sea Symphony*. Yet the general resemblance between the two works—the call of the

[1] Boosey. [2] Curwen.

wild unknown, the joining of hands for the great adventure into 'the deep waters'—is striking enough to suggest a vital connexion.

The ballad, in fact, is 'internalized'. There is enough action to justify the stage setting, but the main point of the music is (as in all orthodox Opera from Monteverde onwards) to express the inward motives of the various characters. This plan is carried out on the Wagnerian *leit-motif* system, with the qualifications that (1) the *motifs* are used with much more restraint than Wagner usually employs; (2) there is a good deal of developed lyric, apart from the folk-songs. The Opera thus lacks the carefully knit melodic design always present in Wagner's mature work, and at the same time avoids the limitations of his system, due to the fact that the *leit-motif*, to be workable, must be dispassionately brief.

There is a certain primitive, Flying Dutchman element about Hugh, and (on the other hand) a certain reminiscence of Irene Forsyte in Mary—John being the 'man of property'—but on the whole the story provides the composer with abundant opportunities for developing that sympathy with *homely* joys and sorrows which he had expressed, musically, in *On Wenlock Edge*. The Opera is thus full of phrases and melodies which are characteristic of his lighter, as well as of his more reflective, moods. Such fresh, breezy tunes as the one beginning

could only have been written by one man.

MATURITY

THE TWO ORCHESTRAL SYMPHONIES

In stressing the choral origins of Vaughan Williams's musical inspiration, I did not mean to convey that he appeared to see no good in the German orchestral tradition. If I am right in considering *A London Symphony* as his first mature work, and the Pastoral Symphony as his most personal, it is to be noted that both these works are pieces of 'absolute' music. The philosophical side of *A Sea Symphony* and of *Hugh the Drover* showed that Vaughan Williams was not afraid of 'music with a meaning'. In the life of thinking beings conscious motives will always have their place, and to rule out their expression in art is to narrow its sphere unnecessarily. But for the moment Vaughan Williams felt, as Beethoven felt habitually, that words were a hindrance to his expression. For the moment, I say, because he followed these Symphonies up with settings from the Missal, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, and *The Revelation*.

A LONDON SYMPHONY[1]

I. *Lento-Allegro risoluto.*
II. *Lento.*
III. *Allegro vivace.*
IV. *Maestoso alla marcia—Lento.*

As I have previously observed, Vaughan Williams found in London something fundamental, something musically inspiring. But apart from a few local details *A London Symphony* is no programme music. The composer has even himself suggested that 'Symphony by

[1] Stainer & Bell.

a Londoner' would be a better title. This, then, is his first essay on purely symphonic lines. There is a certain hesitancy of style. As a sympathetic commentator has pointed out,[1] the argumentative side of Walt Whitman's philosophy (which Stevenson noted as a defect in the poet's work) appears to have dogged Vaughan Williams in this Symphony, making him alternately venturesome and retiring; it was not till the Pastoral Symphony that he was completely 'at home'. Moreover, like the city of its origin, the Symphony is constructed from a mass of heterogeneous and seemingly incongruous material; and like London, again, it has been materially altered in certain places, since it was first planned—chiefly in the third and fourth movements. Yet by steadily concentrating, as he has always done, upon the worth of the matter, rather than upon the neatness of the manner, the composer has achieved a wonderful unity of effect, such as can only be attributed to personality. This impression may not come to the listener at the first hearing, but it will come in the end.

The Symphony is scored for the full modern orchestra. The wood-wind are in threes.[2] The brass includes two cornets, on the general use of which Mr. Forsyth, in his standard book on orchestration, remarked (in 1914): 'In this country there is an absurd prejudice against the instrument, a prejudice based partly on the fact that it was unknown to the ancient masters, partly on a comparison of its tone with that of the Trumpet when playing trumpet-passages, partly on a dislike of its reper-

[1] 'H. C. C.', in an illuminating article in *The Times* (shortly after the production of the Pastoral Symphony on 26 January 1922), in which he compared the three Symphonies.

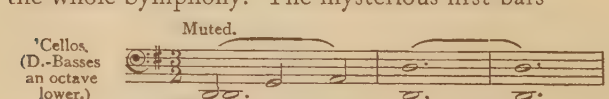
[2] With a possible reduction to wood-wind in twos, by the system of 'cueing' which the composer very wisely sanctions in cases of absolute necessity.

toire, and principally on ignorance. . . . No other Brass Instrument can touch it in florid music.' The percussion consists of three kettle-drums, side-drum and triangle, bass-drum and cymbals, Jingles, Glockenspiel, and harp, the last-named being ' doubled if possible '. It is also to be noted that the trumpet-parts were written for F-trumpets, which would provide a more piercing brilliance than the small-bore instruments invariably used to-day.

Melodically, the Symphony is characterized by the rising interval of a fourth. It will be noticed, in varying explicitness, in each movement. Otherwise there is no thematic connexion between the movements. Probably the composer was anxious to avoid the imaginary construction of pictorial ideas, to which the use of *leit-motifs* in a *London* Symphony might lead.

There is a fairly pronounced key-system between the movements—as there is not in either the *Sea* or the *Pastoral* Symphony. The Prologue and Epilogue are in G major; the first and last movements are, as a whole, in G modal-minor; the two middle movements provide a contrast.

I. *Lento-Allegro risoluto.* The *Lento* is a prologue to the whole Symphony. The mysterious first bars



announce both the characteristic melodic interval of the Symphony and also the characteristic chord, compounded of fourths, which we noticed in *On Wenlock Edge*. As the lower strings begin to expand the tune into shape, the first violins announce a simple descending phrase, and subsequently, with the violas, a theme

which reminds us of the second *leit-motif* of *A Sea Symphony*. 'Ne'er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep.' But the striking of the Westminster chimes announces the imminence of the

Allegro risoluto. This is in an elaborate but well-balanced three-part form, which may conveniently be analysed as follows[1]:

I. *Exposition* (128 bars)

1–45 First Subject, in the tonic (G modal-minor)
- (i) 1–21
- (ii) 22–45

46–128 Second Subject
- (i) 46–74 modulating to
- (ii) 75–83, (iii) 84–95, (iv) 96–128 } the relative major

II. *Development* (122 bars)

1–17 First Subject (i)

18–88 A development of First Subject (ii) and new matter

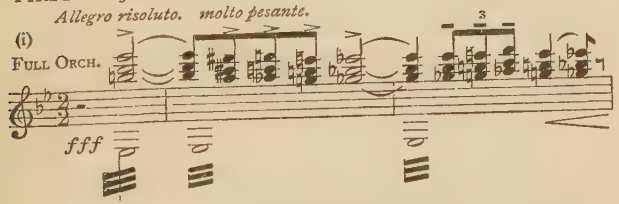
89–122 Second Subject (i)

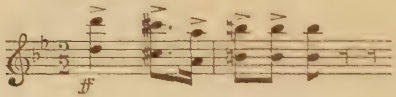
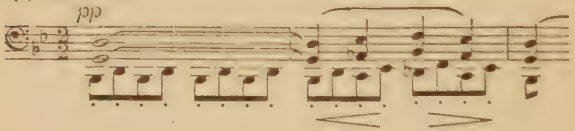
III. *Recapitulation* (120 bars)

1–23 First Subject, in the tonic
- (i) 1–12
- (ii) 13–23

24–106 Second Subject, in the tonic major
- (i) 'omitted'
- (ii) 24–33
- (iii) 34–42
- (iv) 43–106

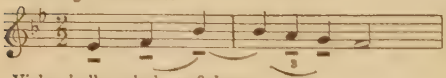
107–20 Coda, in the tonic major

FIRST SUBJECT.

[1] The aim of this and of every other analysis in the book is to show at a glance the proportions of a movement on which symphonic design (as I understand it) mainly depends. Length, in this connexion, is not everything, but it is of considerable importance.

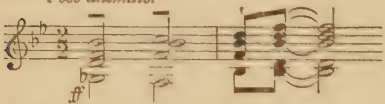
and Woodwind.

(ii) Full Bass.

SECOND SUBJECT.

Pochettino animato.

(i) *f Cantabile.*

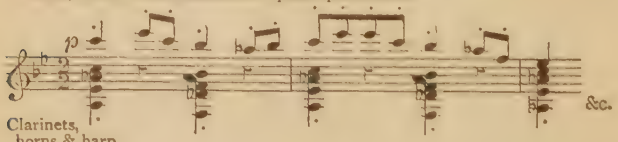


Violas, 'cellos, clarinets & horn.

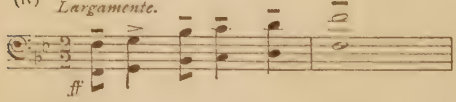
(ii) *Poco animato.*

Woodwind & brass.

(iii)

Piccolo, flute, oboe & bassoon, in quadruple octaves.



Clarinets, horns & harp.

(iv) *Largamente.*

Full bass.

PART I. It seems fairly clear that the composer, when he wrote the First Subject, had in mind the wild hum of London, once likened by a living novelist to 'the noise of some huge animal breathing in its sleep'. Or is it the motion of a more universal being than the spirit of London? To return to the naked facts, the first and vital chord of the First Subject is a chord which drew attention when it occurred in *Songs of Travel*. In the early work it was a passing discord.[1] Now we see it as an essential discord, the deliberate and blunt combination, in fact, of the two opposed chords of E flat (without the fifth) and G. But as we get to know it, we find it is one of those friendly discords which lead one 'home' and not into the wilderness.

The vulgarity of the auxiliary theme to the First Subject (i) may serve to remind us that this is music in direct contact with unadorned realities, however little it is to be 'explained' in terms of ordinary London life. 'There are things that offend our taste in the streets at every moment, which at every moment we forgive under stress of some feeling that goes deeper than taste, till they too take on a kind of pathos we had never dreamed of before the poet showed it us.'[2] And as Mr. Shaw has his vulgarians—always kindly displayed, never with the snobbishness of conscious superiority—so Vaughan Williams, preceded musically by Beethoven, has here put into a Symphony a number of queer snatches of tune, doubly queer in their context, so that we always see the inverted commas.

[1] It is seen in a less transient state at the crisis of the rather later *Toward the Unknown Region*.

[2] From an article on Vaughan Williams in *Music and Letters*, April 1920, by the Editor. I owe to it a good deal of information and a few general suggestions.

In the second part of the First Subject the key settles down for the moment into G modal-minor, and the semblance of a distinct and portentous theme begins to be heard in the lower ranges of each orchestral group, strings, wood-wind, and eventually the brass. The entry of the first violins and a quickening of the time (bar 38) brings melodic issues to a head—for the plain man asks, How much longer is this grunting going on for?—and almost immediately there is a movement towards definite melody, which marks the beginning of the Second Subject.

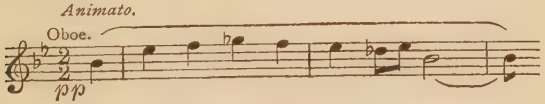
The Second Subject (i) is taken up by various instruments in turn, and leads to a strand of melody, marked by a rising triplet figure, of which something is made in the *Development*; (ii) is characterized by the first two chords, the first being the opening chord of the *Allegro*, reasserted in the previous bars, and the second the opening chord of the Symphony; (iii) is an example of the absolutely original, and yet absolutely home-grown, tune which nobody living but Vaughan Williams seems to produce, its child-like simplicity being underlined, perhaps, by the entry of the triangle.

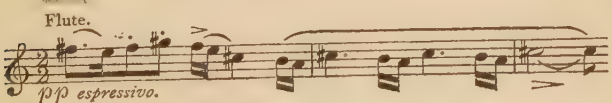
The last part of the Second Subject starts with a development of the first theme of the Introduction into a kind of Jazz pattern, interrupted by an amusing banality in the cornets, which is reinforced by the entry of the side-drum. Equally humorous (or pathetic) is the full orchestra's

A movement on to the second *On Wenlock Edge* chord declares the end of the inverted commas, and intro-

duces a soft restatement of the Second Subject (iii), and a more dignified entry of the theme from the Introduction, which latter leads (as it originally led) to a full presentation of the First Subject (i), thus proclaiming the end of the Exposition.

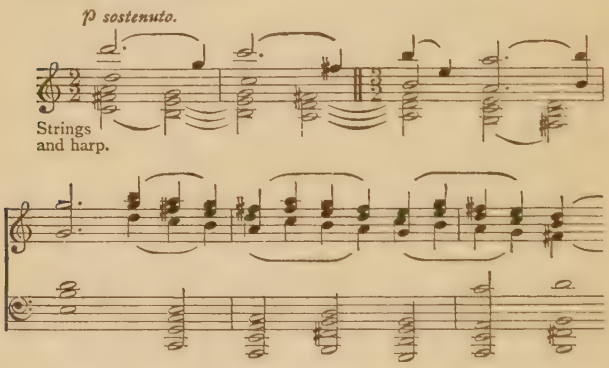
Part II. *Development.* As the First Subject begins to slacken in energy, the horns give out a hybrid melody, compounded of the Introduction theme and the First Subject (ii), which is soon reduced in development to an anticipation of the next movement,



the main interest being in the individuality of the various orchestral instruments. Heard alongside of this is a new scrap of tune, whose antique melodic idiom

will recall to some listeners the third *leit-motif* of *A Sea Symphony*, though its wayward grace is most reminiscent, I think, of the mood of

> A noise like of a hidden brook
> In the leafy month of June,
> That to the sleeping woods all night
> Singeth a quiet tune.

We are as far from home here as the Ancient Mariner was. And now the dreamy tune stops (as with him), and there emerges a new strain, like a far cry from a distant world. Its unearthly character is suggested by the use of a solo octet of strings in contrast with the strings

tutti. Into the expansion of this theme, in which the harp plays a leading part, there creeps, with singular appropriateness, the Second Subject (i), along with its triplet appendage already mentioned. The lingering cadence of this development, which also concludes the *Development* as a whole,

is so personal that one wonders whether the composer did not shrink from a return to the Growling Beast and the wild exuberant jests of the *Exposition*. At any rate, he expanded the quiet, contemplative mood of this *Development* into a whole movement, in the *Lento* which follows; and into a whole Symphony, in the *Pastoral* Symphony.

Part III. Moreover, there is every sign of an attempt to tone down the *Recapitulation*. The wildness of the First Subject is softened by its *pp* re-entry, the brass being muted. (It is a notable fact that Vaughan Williams's recapitulations start either *ff*, as in the *Finales* of the *Sea* and *Pastoral* Symphonies, or *pp*, as here.) The First Subject is also cut down to half its former length, as a glance at the analysis will show. It

had a 'good mention' at the beginning of the *Development*.

For similar reasons, no doubt, the first part of the Second Subject is 'omitted'. Add that the second part enters *pp* instead of *ff*, and we shall see why we find ourselves listening to the Second Subject before we have had time to expect its recapitulation. There is also a pleasantly unexpected switch into E major, in which key the Second Subject (iii) is delivered before its restatement in G major. Finally, the last part of the Subject is considerably modified by the deliberate expansion of the former commonplace quoted (or rather of the first bar of it) by 'augmentation', development in E and A flat major (in swift sequel), and augmentation again. The last process, in G major, recalls the descending passage of the Introduction, and so leads into other matter from it. After this, the Recapitulation is resumed (bars 84–106), the expected reference to the Second Subject (iii) being made in E major by the trombones, *ff*. The final entry of the Introduction theme, stalking sedately upwards from the lowest gamut of audibility, is accompanied by the reiterated commonplace just mentioned, now assuming the dignity of the sublime (cf. Beethoven *passim*).

The Coda which follows begins, of course, with a final reference to the First Subject (i). And then the Second Subject (ii), delivered broadly by the brass, brings the movement to a brilliant close. Here, if anywhere, Vaughan Williams re-echoes those quaintly stirring words of William Dunbar

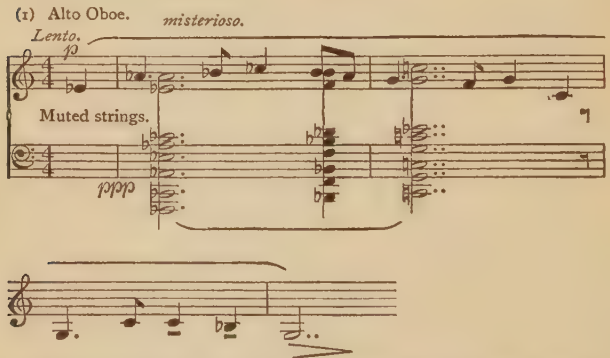
London, thou art of townes *A per se*.

There is every variety of orchestral sound in this movement. It has its bright, scintillating moments as well as the equally needed 'mushy' effects, and instances

of the broad, 'effective' treatment are balanced by tinges of orchestral colour as personal as one may wish.

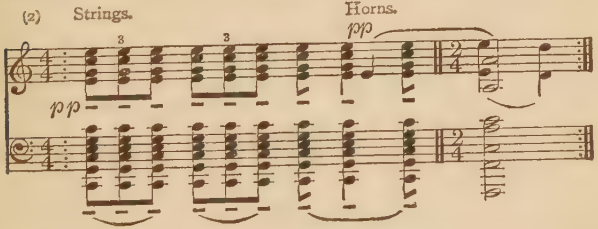
II. *Lento.* Vaughan Williams's fondness for new string-effects is most obvious in this movement and the *Finale*, in both of which the violas and 'cellos are divided from the start. The cornets are not heard in this movement. All vulgarity is now 'taboo'.

The movement falls clearly into three parts, of which the first is defined by its contrast with the second, the contrast being shown, as usual, from either side—AB*A*. The three parts contain respectively 58, 69, and 35 bars, but the middle part is faster and therefore says less in the same number of bars than the other two parts.

The first part (which must surely owe something to Whistler) begins with some 9-part but very stark harmony in the lower strings,[1] out of which a tune emerges in the alto oboe:

One may note that the tune starts with the now familiar

[1] It is interesting, harmonically, to compare this opening with that of the slow movement of *A Sea Symphony*, which strikes the same chord of feeling. The later movement is much plainer: it is simply a sequence of 'common chords' in root position.

rise of a fourth, which is also noticeable in the last bar but one; and that it recalls a theme in the *Development* of the previous movement,[1] both in its melodic contour and in a certain uncanny simplicity. After the strings have taken up the theme in unison, and a little point has been made of the last two bars of it (over a Scriabinish chord), a new and more satisfying Subject is announced in which the rise of a fourth is equally prominent.



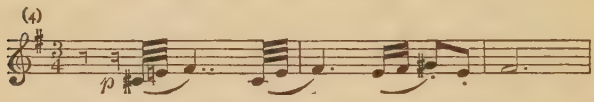
This resembles the conclusion of the slow movement of *A Sea Symphony*. After its simple statement the violins and wood-wind take up the first Subject in E minor (the chord of which began the movement), and conclude the first part of the movement with a passing allusion to the second Subject.

The second part is less tranquil, and has some of the wayward grace which we noted in the first movement. Melodically, it is fragmentary. One may quote a few salient phrases without giving the reader a very illuminating idea of the general mood, which is primarily orchestral in expression. The first theme, played by a solo viola and 'pivotal' in type,

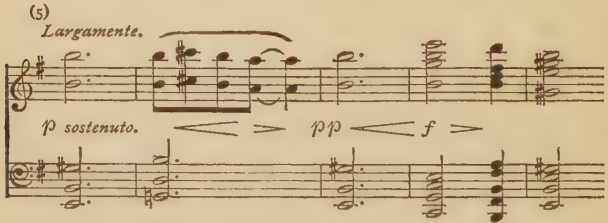
[1] See p. 39.

may be regarded as the basis of various other snatches of melody which 'melt into one another like the voices of birds on a spring morning'. The end of the third bar, for instance, may suggest the

(4)



of the first clarinet, just as the first bar may itself recall the first Subject of the movement, bar two. The chord against which this clarinet-strain is heard is the first chord of the Symphony.[1] It proceeds to dominate the harmony until it moves, by way of a passing whole-tone discord, into a striking and very characteristic sequence of 'common chords' and sevenths

(5)

which hints at a climax. And after a few references to No. 4 the same sequence of chords is repeated with fuller orchestration in another key, and the climax realized. When it has died down (with an allusion to the first bar of the second theme of the movement), the recapitulation of the first part begins.

This recapitulation presents, apart from its compression, certain new features, notably a patch of unexpected acidities, in comparison with which the brief reference to the Second Subject is doubly tranquillizing

[1] A point underlined in the third bar by the entry of the *Jingles*.

in effect. Into the latter the solo viola weaves its former strain (No. 3), which it is left to finish alone, in the last few bars. The composer's sympathy for pure viola-tone has already been observed in earlier work.

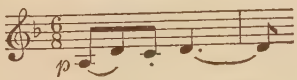
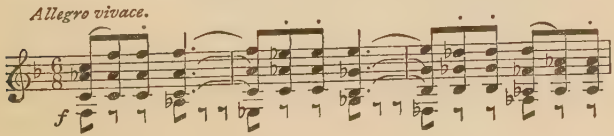
This is the most purely musical movement of the Symphony, and for that reason, I would venture to urge, the most beautiful. Its creation must have given the composer peculiar pleasure. It is the kind of movement which, it seems, almost writes itself.

III. *Scherzo* (*Nocturne*). *Allegro vivace.* The elusive character of this movement—reflecting, no doubt, the subdued glitter and patter of London street-life at night—recalls the *Scherzo* of *A Sea Symphony*.

The mood of the main section of the movement is defined by contrast with two episodes, as follows:

	: A :	B	A	C	A	Coda
bars	98+97	28	69	70	37	92

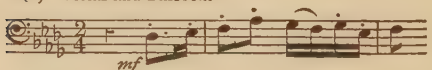
It will be observed that the second episode is longer than the first. It is also much more clearly contrasted with 'A'.

'A' consists of two Subjects. The first, in D modal-minor, is primarily a rhythm . Its most characteristic melodic form, first defined by the clarinets,

is in the Aeolian mode and is marked, once again, by the rise of a fourth. Another feature of the first Subject, which recurs throughout the movement, is one of those plain sequences of which the composer is so fond—

The same three chords, reversed, began the previous movement.

The second Subject, in B flat modal-minor, is a group of melodic scraps:

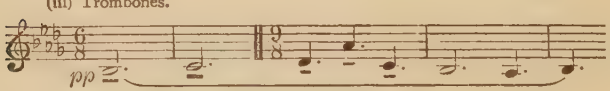
(i) 'Cellos.

(ii) Violas and Bassoon.



(This can just be picked out at its first occurrence owing to its duple rhythm, as against the triple rhythm of the remaining material.)

(iii) Trombones.



is characterized by the Aeolian mode.

'B', which is rather more lively and boisterous than 'A', has its own theme, given out by 'cellos and horns, but the general rhythm of 'A' is prevalent throughout.

The first repeat of 'A' is fairly complete. The First Subject is in D modal-minor as before, and contains a reference to 'B'. The mode of the Second Subject (i) is changed to the Mixo-Lydian, the key being still D; (ii) changes to the (?) Dorian mode; (iii) returns to the Aeolian, but starts on the third of the scale. It is only a question of altering a semitone or two, but the swift alteration is very striking if one listens carefully.

'C' is a gigantic piece of realism. The strings and muted horns transform themselves into a super-mouth-organ, and the wood-wind announce a regular street

tune, which has already been implied in the second Subject (ii) of 'A'. This may be a very good gibe, but musically I regard it as sheer tomfoolery. Perhaps the piquancy of the rhythm will attract some listeners. Anyhow, this section provides the much needed contrast, in the shape of a fool-proof tune in the more familiar major mode.

In the subsequent repetition of 'A' the First Subject is represented by ten bars. The Second Subject (i) is either 'omitted' or 'developed' into a similar snatch of tune (cornets, clarinets, and first violins), leading to a lightning re-presentation of the first theme of the Symphony; (ii) is then recapitulated with some emphasis; and finally (iii), or something like it.

An insistence on the characteristic twist of the First Subject marks the Coda. Originally—before the post-war revision—the movement proceeded to a third and lengthy episode, followed by a Coda containing a good deal more recapitulation than the one which stands in the revised edition. I have no doubt that the composer was right in cutting out another episode, but I do not see his point in retaining fragmentary allusions to it, in the present Coda. It is not a very convincing form of address to remark, as he appears to me to do, 'Now there was a lot more I had to say, but there is the whole of the next movement to come, so I shall just give you some of the bits I had in mind . . . this was one . . . and that was another . . . I'll repeat them . . . now I really must stop.' And the average listener, who has not heard the excised episode, must be extremely puzzled by the length of the present Coda, and by the obscure allusions to matter he has not heard before. However, the characteristic employment of a solo violin, solo viola, and solo 'cello gives an intimate effect, and the

last page of the score (in which we are left with the 'grin' of the tune without its body) is a pleasant bit of writing. The two final chords are marked *pppp*: the vision fades into nothingness.

On the whole I find this the least interesting movement. It may be quietly exciting, but it does not excite me.

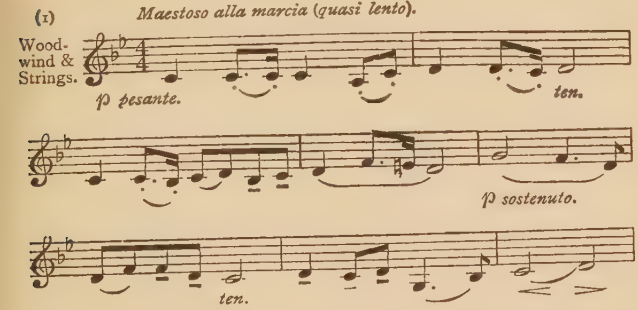
IV. *Andante con moto—Maestoso alla marcia* (*quasi lento*)*—Allegro—Maestoso alla marcia—Lento.*

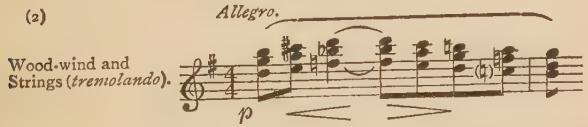
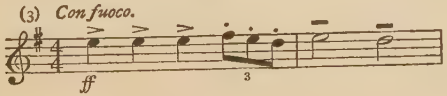
The violas and 'cellos are divided, as in the slow movement; the effect is appreciably to thicken the sound of the string-tone.

In this movement, especially, there is a struggle for expression. Such a struggle is apparent in the introductory *Andante*. As a matter of fact, the grinding discords of these few bars explain themselves more clearly to those who have heard the third episode of the *Scherzo*, now cut out. One can see, of course, *afterwards* that this agonized striving was intended as a setting for the calm, heroic march-tune, but as we do not know at the beginning what is coming later, the discordant challenge is, after the *Scherzo* as revised, strikingly blunt. Bluntness of manner, however, is a mark of individualism which we have already noted as an English characteristic displayed by Vaughan Williams —a sign of sincerity.

Apart from the Introduction and Epilogue the movement falls into the usual three sections, the middle one being *allegro* and containing mostly fresh matter. The proportions are 40, 65, and 53 bars, but it must be remembered that the middle 65 go quicker than the remainder.

The opening section (which may be compared with the *Finale* of Elgar's first Symphony) reveals a complete

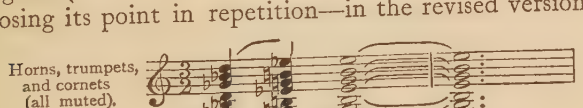
tune in two clear-cut phrases, deliberate but decisive; the modal flavour adds grit :

After this has been taken up by the wood-wind, and the second phrase repeated a second time, the strings play two seemingly irrelevant bars (apart from the *pizzicato* rhythm), which a little later introduce the middle of the movement; they are answered here by the first two bars of the march-tune, newly harmonized, and this kind of treatment carries the music into the contrasted *Allegro*.

In the *Allegro* we may distinguish, first, a characteristic snatch of harmony

which leads very soon into the frantically energetic delivery by the full orchestra of this 'plain-chant'—

2 and 3 are then treated in conjunction, 3 being also fully repeated a tone higher than at first, and finally 2 brings us back to the opening march in a manner resembling the end of its former Introduction.[1]

The march-tune is not given a plain restatement: its successive phrases are taken up and developed immediately. And the music soon begins to quicken in intensity and energy; the Introduction returns and then the First Subject (i) of the first movement. Upon the latter suggestion, a solo quartet of strings take up, *ppp*, the vital chord of that Subject, against which the harp strikes the three-quarter Westminster chime. On the last stroke the strings *tutti* take on the chord from the solo quartet, thus incorporating a personal touch into the general design. This chord, followed by a moment of complete silence (almost the first in the Symphony), ushers in the Epilogue.

The Epilogue starts, of course, by recalling the opening theme of the Symphony—under a shimmer of strings and wood-wind. At first only the first three notes are heard, in several keys. (At one point the bass-trombone and tuba are made to push the *motif* out in a manner which, however *ppp*, inevitably suggests Fafner. Perhaps the London Beast has a family likeness to that noble dragon.) Eventually a very restrained allusion to the Introduction of the present movement leads

[1] In the original version of this movement the Introduction theme is introduced, by no means briefly, between the two main entries of 3; and just when we expect the Recapitulation, a new and sustained melody is announced and repeated in full; the march-tune then returns. The revised version is, of course, more compact, but the early incursion of the Introduction theme into the Recapitulation becomes less intelligible, or at least less expected. (My thanks are due to Mr. A. C. Boult for lending me his manuscript copy of the original version of the Symphony.)

into a complete (and rather lengthy[1]) recapitulation of the Prologue of the Symphony, in the original key. Finally, the Introduction to the movement is recalled again (twice in the original version, once—without losing its point in repetition—in the revised version),

and in the resolution of the discord the Symphony dies away into space. The opening challenge of the movement has been met by a resort to the first principles asserted by the initial mood of the Symphony. Or to put the point in another way, 'the vision of our city fades once more into the fog out of which it had arisen'. As every Londoner knows, London—the ultimate thing—is unfathomable and impenetrable.

PASTORAL SYMPHONY (1922)[2]

I. *Molto moderato.*
II. *Lento moderato.*
III. *Moderato pesante.*
IV. *Moderato maestoso.*

In this work, as I have already hinted, Vaughan Williams confidently expanded on a symphonic scale what we may regard as his most personal mood, the mood of dreamy but impassioned contemplation. In *A London Symphony* we observed a certain struggle for expression. In the Pastoral Symphony clarity of exposition is one of the most striking features. Some listeners will find the more heroic passion of the earlier Sym-

[1] Although it was nearly halved in revision. [2] Curwen.

phony the more convincing; or they will wonder whether Vaughan Williams was not a little too sure of himself when he wrote four successive movements at the same deliberate pace. But greatness and attractiveness apart, I am convinced that this is the most personal of the three Symphonies, the whole-hearted enjoyment of which is the best critical test of the listener's willingness to accept Vaughan Williams entire. In this Symphony, if any, he unlocked his heart.

As in the London Symphony, the composer has given us a clue as to what set him 'thinking in sound', and why his thought has moved with such unbroken serenity. Nor need I enumerate again (from the Introduction to this book) the various inducements he may have had for going to the countryside for fresh inspiration. But his Pastoral Symphony should be compared with that of Bach, rather than with that of Beethoven. It contains nothing of the 'impudent realism' in which Beethoven indulged in spite of his professed aim to 'express feeling, rather than paint pictures'. The title of the Symphony may help the listener to start with his mind in tune with the serene, yet bracing character of the whole work;[1] and it may reawaken in the average urbanized person the peculiar thrill, as of eternally fresh air, which assailed his senses when he last stepped into a country lane, and also (in another way of speaking) the kind of *breathless* adoration which one associates with the quiet spaciousness of the country. But the composer's thought, once stimulated by the pastoral surroundings, unfolds itself on musical lines, and must so be followed. And the present writer can never forget the purely musical impressions he received

[1] The same kind of temperate, English freshness breathes through the Ballet Suite *Old King Cole*, written a little later (Curwen).

when playing at the first rehearsal. In the words of a critic already quoted, 'Vaughan Williams lets us forget everything except that there is music going on'.

The scoring is for full orchestra. The wood-wind are in threes except that there is no double-bassoon; there are three trumpets (in C), one Natural E-flat trumpet being used in the second movement; the percussion includes a very active harp. In the last movement there is a small part (without words) for soprano or tenor solo. With 'cueing', a smaller orchestra may be used.

There is no thematic connexion between the movements. The first and third movements are both in the key of G, in varying modes; the second and fourth movements provide contrasts. The first and third movements move, on the whole, at the same deliberate pace; the other two are a little slower, and more leisurely; the third movement is the liveliest by comparison. In other words, the movements hold together by their common bond of contemplative feeling, not by the system of ordered contrasts usual in a Symphony and followed to some extent in the two previous Symphonies. On the other hand, within each movement the general design is remarkably clear and convincing, while the rhythmic freedom of the whole work prevents anything like a formal effect.

I. *Molto moderato.* In this movement and the next there is a third clarinet and no bass-clarinet, and no trombones, and the absence of heavy bass gives a certain ethereal freshness to the general development, to which the frequent appearance of a solo-violin makes its contribution.

The Symphony starts, as usual, with the most elaborate movement, but the listener will have no difficulty

in distinguishing the Exposition of the themes, a slight Development, a brief but plain Recapitulation, and a short Coda or final development. The shortness of the whole movement is notable, in fact, when we think of the first movements of the two preceding Symphonies. The truth is that although there are plenty of themes, none except the first needs further elaboration (cf. the first and last movements of the G minor Symphony of Mozart). But the movement is worth analysing further, if it is understood that the various sections, distinguished below, coalesce more than they contrast:

I. *Exposition* (71 bars)

1–41 First Subject
- (i) 1–29 in G
- (ii) 28–41 leading to

41–62 Second Subject (in A)
- (i) 41–49
- (ii) 50–62

63–71 Codetta

II. *Development* (36 bars)

First Subject (i), in various keys

III. *Recapitulation* (40 bars)

1–19 First Subject
- (i) 1–10
- (ii) 11–19 (digression)

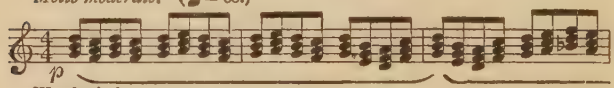
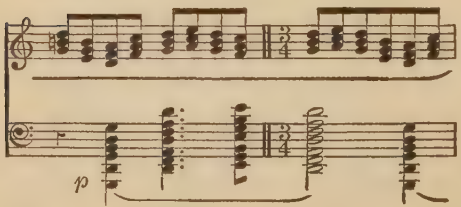
20–40 Second Subject (in G)
- (i) 20–30
- (ii) 31–40

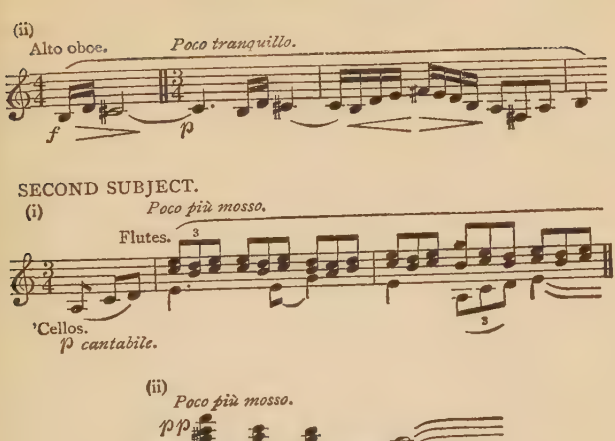
IV. *Coda* (41 bars)

First Subject, in G

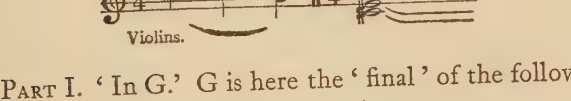
FIRST SUBJECT.

(i)

Molto moderato. (♩ = 80.)

Wood-wind.

Harp & bass strings.



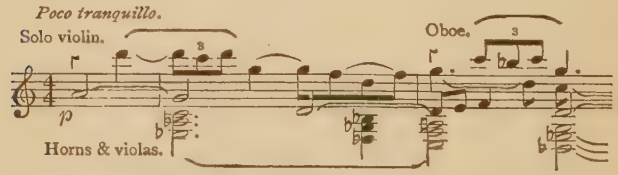
PART I. 'In G.' G is here the 'final' of the following scale:



We must regard the B flat not only as an essential note in the scale, but even as a kind of 'dominant'. The Second Subject is based on the same scale, transposed up a tone. The melting of the minor third into the major third, which is the most distinctive feature, may be observed at once, in the third and fourth bars of the movement.

The other feature of the opening bars, which is prominent throughout, is the movement of the wood-wind in consecutive fifths. For whatever reason, consecutive fifths were put into the corner by composers

of every School up to Debussy. It has been (as Mr. R. O. Morris has pointed out[1]) the privilege of the twentieth century to rescue the fifths from this position. Vaughan Williams uses them habitually. Sometimes they appear to be a trick to keep the music going while he is thinking what to say next. Here they are used with instinctive appropriateness to provide that plain and yet fresh colour which is to be the characteristic setting of this pastoral Symphony. The entry of the main theme into this pellucid stream of harmony could not have been more beautifully planned.

It is quietly answered by a cognate phrase on the solo-violin, and lest the opening sweetness should prove too saccharine if perpetuated, the *On Wenlock Edge* chord is used, in an inversion, and a harmonic sequence developed from it which is worth quoting as an example of the kind of simple dissonance prominent in this Symphony:

When the lower $\frac{6}{4}$ harmony has slunk down to the chord of C flat, the violins repeat the principal theme, with the harp in canon in their third bar. Other strands of melody having been suggested, on the lines of divergence indicated in the above example, a formal cadence is made, the second inversion of the chord of B flat minor

[1] *Contrapuntal Technique in the Sixteenth Century*, p. 41 (Oxford University Press). See also the second appendix to Mr. Morris's *Harmony*, an equally masterly exposure of facts and superstitions.

melting into the chord of G major. While this is being repeated, the alto oboe fits in the second theme of the First Subject, which is taken up in turn by solo-viola, clarinet, solo-violin, and oboe; its striking pentatonic outline being defined by the contrast of opposing lines of melodic development. The key (or shall we say the final?) appears, meanwhile, to be heading for F sharp, but it unexpectedly drops into A, which proves to be the key of the rest of the Exposition.

The entry of the Second Subject is marked both by this establishment of a new key and by a slight quickening of the time. The development of the first part of the Subject is very brief—just two entries—but it is the kind of theme one never forgets. The next theme quoted (the inversion of the first *motif* of *A London Symphony*) suggests a cadence in the new key. But A may be the ' dominant ' of F sharp (in the new sense), and so a slight digression is contrived into the latter key, introducing a pleasant bit of tune in the oboe which is heard in the corresponding place at the end of the Recapitulation, and also in the Development. The key of A having been re-established by the repetition of the Second Subject (ii), a Codetta or temporary conclusion is constructed on the basis of the First Subject (i), in which the harp throbs expressively. A drop into C minor, harmonically parallel to the entry of the Second Subject, announces the beginning of the Development.

Part II. The new expression-mark, '*Ma animato*,' the delivery of each scrap of melody by a solo instrument, and the removal of any noticeable bass, combine to give a wonderful floating sensation to the beginning of the Development. The tonality is also elusive,

eventually oscillating between D flat and B flat, while the principal theme stretches its length *sonore* in the bass, thus achieving its full dignity and carrying the music to the first general *forte* (not *fortissimo*). After the excitement of this restrained climax has spent itself, the movement slows down for a few bars, during which a reference to the initial solo-violin phrase suggests a Recapitulation, and when the original *tempo* has been resumed the Recapitulation begins.

PART III. The listener, however, will hardly be aware that it has begun. The opening bars of the movement having been plainly resumed in the Codetta of the Exposition, and the principal theme having been fully exploited in the Development, the composer deemed it unnecessary to start all over again. The Recapitulation begins, therefore, with the 'cross-points' preceding the final cadence of the first part of the First Subject (bars 18–23 of the Exposition); hence the rather transient character of this section.

Otherwise the recapitulation is plain and thorough. There are a few new features. The first part of the Second Subject is presented with a major third, and with fuller orchestration, at its second entry, thus exhibiting its exuberant as well as its thoughtful side; and the key of the Second Subject being G, there is no need to establish it (as A had to be established in the Exposition), and so the tonality slips *at once* into the key a minor third above, for the entry of the Second Subject (ii), only to be switched back to G after three bars.

PART IV. The Codetta, being itself in the manner of a recapitulation, is not repeated. It is replaced by a Coda (long enough to be distinguished from the Recapitulation in the above analysis) in which the principal

theme is shown in a new and rather intense light. Finally, the original cadence of the First Subject (i) is reached, and the second part of the Subject is begun by the alto oboe, the rest of the orchestra clinging to the chord of G. The oboe, left to itself, eventually resolves its dissonant C sharp on to B, and the bass-strings can then contentedly whisper the first four notes of the principal theme. The simplicity and restraint of this conclusion is very characteristic of the composer. The end of the first movement of Beethoven's lyrical Number Eight is similar.

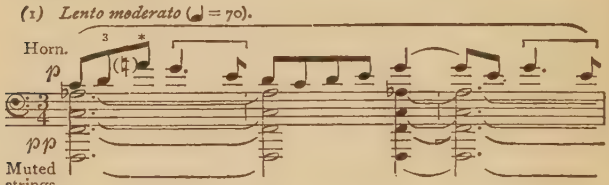
II. *Lento moderato*. The trumpets are not heard in this movement except for the single entry of the Natural trumpet. Their sharp appeal is replaced, in a manner, by the individuality of a solo-viola and a solo-'cello, and by the richness of tone created by the division of the 'cellos (apart from the solo-player). Cf. the slow movement of *A London Symphony*.

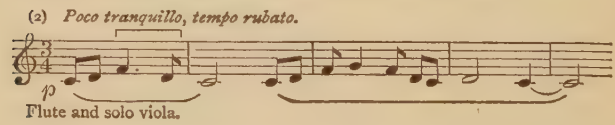
This movement is the 'slow' movement: apart from its slightly slower pace, things move along more deliberately than in the other movements, especially the bass. But its general character is, of course, much less contrasted with the first movement than in any other Symphony yet written.

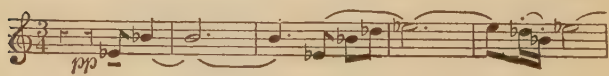
The movement falls into two parts, the second being closely modelled on the first, as follows:

I. *Exposition* (74 bars)	II. *Recapitulation* (54 bars)
1–66 First Subject in F, modulating to	1–37 First Subject in E flat, modulating to
67–74 Second Subject in E flat	38–47 Second Subject } in 48–54 Coda } F

PART I. In the pleasantly lazy First Subject two cognate themes may be distinguished. First, the open-

ing phrase, in which the major third is now heard *simultaneously* with the minor third:

It is answered by a *Tristan*-like rising phrase in the violins, characterized by what theorists used to call 'false relation'; the juxtaposition, for example, at the top of the phrase, of the first inversions of F minor and D minor, the rhythm being supplied by the end of the first bar of the tune quoted above. While the violins are climbing down again, oboe and clarinet repeat 1, and the underlining by the horn of their final phrase leads to its development as a separate theme:



After the tonality has shifted considerably, and 1 and 2 have been repeated in close conjunction, the key settles down into E flat, in which the Natural E flat trumpet enters with the Second Subject, consisting of a *cadenza* beginning as follows:

The point of the Natural trumpet is that all the notes played, being in the harmonic series of E flat, shall

sound their true intonation, thus giving a peculiar purity of effect. I confess that my ear for one is incapable of appreciating this, the fifth note in the tune always sounding to me, not as the natural offspring of the fundamental E flat (of which it is exactly, indeed, the seventh overtone), but as a flat D flat. I do not suggest that the composer is mistaken in employing a Natural trumpet, but that he is mistaken in supposing that ordinary D flat sounds any less natural than 'natural' D flat, to ears habitually used to equating the two. Nevertheless, the general effect is extraordinarily refreshing.

Part II. The trumpet works up to a climax which proves to be a strenuous return to the first theme of the First Subject, delivered by the whole orchestra. The climax soon subsides, and the recapitulation of the remaining material proceeds. It is naturally compressed, the Exposition having contained a good deal of 'development' which demands no repetition. The vagueness of the tonality gives additional repose to the entry of the Second Subject in the original key of the movement. It is played this time by a Natural horn (in F), and in order that we may listen to it with full attention, the clarinet plays against it the opening theme of the movement. The strings, meanwhile, walk down in whole tones from the chord of F to the chord of C flat, against which the horn's final C natural is in keeping with the harmonic colour of the whole movement. Finally, the violins return to their initial upward phrase, turning it so as to drop from the top chord of A flat minor on to F minor, *pppp*.

III. *Moderato pesante*. This is the only movement in which the whole of the percussion is used (including

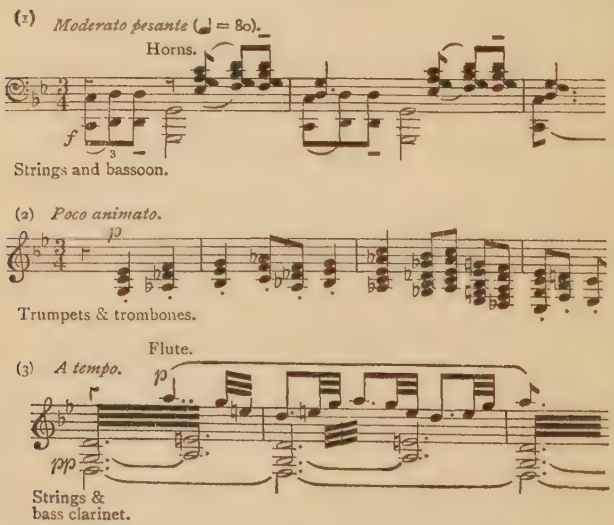
a Celesta). Its heavy but boisterous gait, with outbursts of *esprit* and a final spurt at the end, provides the greatest contrast in the whole Symphony—a contrast much needed. Harmonically, we return to the key of G.

The movement falls clearly into five parts, arranged as follows:

	A	B	A	B	Coda
bars	46	56	31	23	71

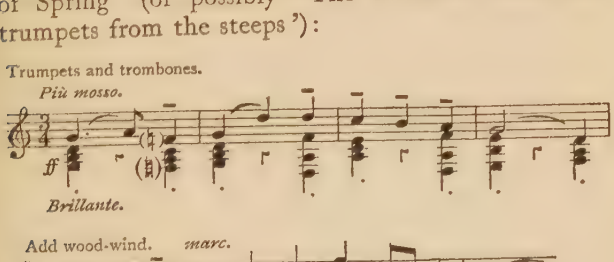
it being noted that the Coda is mostly *presto* and therefore a much lighter conclusion than it looks.

'A' is based on three contrasted themes, delivered at first in turn:



the last being peculiarly suggestive of the first spring morning of the year. Its lyrical rapture (recalling that

of *The Lark ascending*) is realized even more when we hear it in the violins against the winter austerity of 1 in the basses. Winter triumphs for the moment, but it cannot stay the entry of a new and splendidly reckless tune, which I am tempted to label 'Triumphal song of Spring' (or possibly 'The cataracts blow their trumpets from the steeps'):



Instead, I would point out that we here return to the scale on which the first movement was based, now exhibited in a new and almost radiant light. The conclusion of the *Gloria* of the Mass is similar in tone and construction.

The whole of 'B' is based on this magnificent piece of melody, the first bar receiving particular attention in development. Having reached a climax, *fff*, the orchestra rush headlong back into 'A'.

In the repetition of 'A', 1 is now followed by 3, against which 2 is then heard. 1 returns for a moment, only to be banished as before by the appearance of 'B'.

'B' is reintroduced with fuller orchestration; violins *tremolando*, and a good deal of percussion to emphasize the main rhythm. Having previously been given its

head, 'B' is not able this time to do more than half the course, at the end of which it pulls up instead of rushing wildly on.

The Coda begins, of course, with a few bars of 'A', and we listen breathlessly for the next and final event. It proves to be a regular scamper for the last bar, *sempre pp e legatissimo*. One may just distinguish in turn a new scrap of tune, 3 in a new rhythm, and 2. But it is all sheer fairyland, and everything has a new and magical touch about it. This kind of gossamer tread is a little unexpected in the music of Vaughan Williams, and is worth remembering by those who say he always writes with his boots on.

The magic spell is broken at the end by the reappearance of the *On Wenlock Edge* chord and then 1, now softened by means of a major third. (I must apologize for supplying this unwarranted 'programme'. What I wish to convey is that the Coda of this movement is one of the most delightful and thrilling things in all music.)

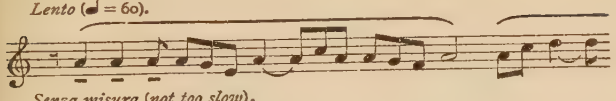
IV. *Lento—Moderato maestoso—Lento.* This is, I think, the first symphonic movement to introduce a wordless solo voice as part of the orchestra. The effect is extremely moving, and a clarinet, which plays when there is no singer available, would be a poor substitute. A Shepherd Boy (of standard Wordsworthian simplicity) suggests itself.

The movement is plainly in three parts, as follows:

I. *Exposition* (55 bars)	III. *Recapitulation* (48 bars)
1–4 First Subject	1–8 First Subject
5–55 Second Subject	9–39 Second Subject
	40–48 Coda
II. *Development* (54 bars)	
Based on both Subjects	

FIRST SUBJECT.

Lento (♩ = 60).

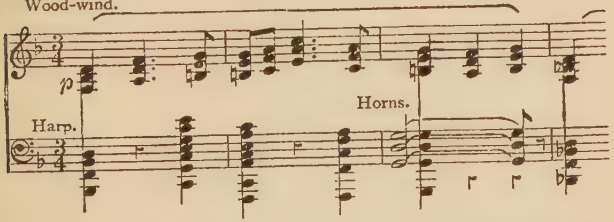


Senza misura (*not too slow*).

SECOND SUBJECT.

Moderato maestoso (♩ = 72).

Wood-wind.



PART I. The *vers libre* of the opening Plainsong for the distant voice, with only a drum to set it off, and the fact that no words are used, clearly indicate a return to the contemplative and introspective manner of the Symphony as a whole. This impression is continued in the tentative delivery of the Second Subject, which does not achieve the coherent expression of the quotation above until after nine bars. When it does come in full at last, we realize that it strikes a deeper note than any previous theme, and can understand why this movement comes last. Moreover, the extraordinary spaciousness of the rhythm and orchestration, which is noticeable from the beginning of the Symphony—a feeling of plenty of time and space, all well filled, yet not over-filled—is expanded even more in this movement. Finally, it is interesting to note that the Lydian mode here used (B flat being the final) is not found elsewhere, in a work of any distinction, except in the slow movement of Beethoven's quartet in A minor,

Op. 132, one of the most intimate things he ever wrote, and one of the most sublime.

After the wood-wind have brought the melody to a slight climax (marked by the quiet entry of the trombones), the violas, 'cellos, and second clarinet take it up again, and a similar climax is reached in a new key. When this has calmed down, the Development begins.

PART II. The most noticeable feature of the Development is the continuous change of *tempo*, as well as of key. It starts, for example, with three bars of *animato* (strings *tremolando*), three bars of *allargando* (First Subject in the alto oboe), and then two bars of the Second Subject in the trombones, one bar *stringendo* and the other *allargando*. The process is then repeated with variations, a solo-violin replacing the alto oboe, and the Second Subject being delivered by the horns and taken up by the rest of the brass in canon. After the excitement of these bars, the tranquillity of the *poco più lento* which follows is grateful to the ear. The 'cellos, and subsequently the flute, expand the First Subject; the *On Wenlock Edge* chord inverted (see p. 56) being a prominent feature. The *animato* is then resumed, and in a very few bars an intense climax is realized, perhaps the climax of the whole Symphony. It consists of the plain but impassioned recapitulation of the First Subject, *molto largamente*, by strings and wood-wind in octaves, in the highest possible register. ('One has climbed the hill, and can look away to a horizon which seems infinitely distant,' suggests a critic already quoted.) It is a wonderful moment of reminiscence, and the strings seek to preserve it by continuing their figure while the trombones, *pp*, go on to the Second Subject.

PART III. The rest of the Recapitulation is easily followed. The re-presentation of the Second Subject is richer than before, and leads to a larger climax, more striking for being more quickly reached. When it has sunk down, the strings take up the Second Subject in the deeply meditative manner with which they originally suggested it, and the violins having thus soared up to high A, the distant singer is heard again with the First Subject (less the opening phrase, which has been well used in the Development). The conclusion seems to be, in words, 'Climbing is all very thrilling, but I prefer the more serene ecstasy of the plain foothills.'

The movement ends *niente*, of course, like all the others. I conjecture that *niente*, or a similar mark of expression, is about as characteristic of Vaughan Williams as *nobilmente* of Elgar. It is at any rate to be noted that in this his most characteristic Symphony every movement ends by vanishing into the world inaudible. Vaughan Williams clearly feels (and most musicians will agree with him) that while music is as good a way as any for presenting the ultimate truths, it has its limitations, in face of which it must, by a final reticence, confess itself inadequate, and unable to grasp as far as it would reach.

MASS IN G MINOR[1]

For Soli (S.A.T.B.) and Double Chorus (1922).

While he was writing his most personal Symphony, Vaughan Williams was finding in the setting of the Mass *a capella* an almost equally congenial form of

[1] Curwen, who also publish a setting for the English service.

expression, in spite of the limitations which he thought good to impose upon himself in the process. In this work, more than any other, he shows the Tudor sources of his inspiration, and by his plain and whole-hearted revival of that tradition (with enough personal modifications to prevent a purely imitative style) suggests a reason why his music sounds so unlike the great German Schools of the last century.

From two points of view this Mass may be regarded as proceeding from the sixteenth century. Clearly composed for actual Church use (whether in the Roman Communion or in the Anglican), it follows the words closely, and the musical interest is consistently restrained, except perhaps in the *Kyrie*. Further, the composer has limited his harmonic material to triads and their inversions, while making use of those uncompromising part-progressions which distinguished the English Schools for some two centuries, and which the faithfully academic have agreed to ban under the name of 'false relationships'.[1] We shall look in vain, then, for the stupendous musical stature, or for the acutely dramatic qualities, of the Masses of Bach and Beethoven; nor shall we expect any marked originality of musical treatment.

Yet the Mass 'in G minor' is curiously original and beautiful. The *Kyrie*, with a continuity of 'line' which would have done even Palestrina credit, hangs together the best, but the other numbers are short enough not to make the lack of musically structural devices a matter of consequence. The restraint of the *Et incarnatus*, and of the third paragraph of the *Credo*, is particularly impressive. Passages like these sound

[1] See Chapter XIII of Dr. Ernest Walker's *History of Music in England*.

infinitely more vital than they look. They are refreshing to hear after the tinkling cymbals of some Modern Orchestral Noises one could name.

We may trace the novelty of effect to two technical causes. First, the Mass is entirely based on the scale used in the first movement of the Pastoral Symphony, i.e. the Dorian mode plus the major third, or the Mixo-Lydian mode plus the minor third, according to circumstances. The 'final' is mainly G. It changes to E on the last page of the *Sanctus*, to A (on the whole) in the *Benedictus*, and oscillates between E and G in the *Agnus Dei*, so underlining the critical nature of the appeal for mercy. The first and third parts of the *Kyrie* are in the Dorian mode, the second mainly in the Mixo-Lydian mode, so that the number as a whole is based on the flattened seventh, and contrast of major and minor third, which distinguish the scale under discussion. Thus, the whole of the Mass is founded on 'false relation'. The characteristic sequence represented by the chord of B flat major resolving on to the chord of G major is almost the *leit-motif* of the work. 'G minor' is surely a misnomer.

Secondly, the plainness of the counterpoint. There is nothing of the elaborate 8-part texture which Bach so often creates in his double choruses. Instead, the delivery of one melodic line by one whole chorus is heard against the delivery of an opposed line by the other chorus, simultaneously or in quick antiphonal succession; this downright contrast of rhythm and sound being typical of the composer. It is part of the same system that the four parts of either chorus move in parallel motion more often than not; hence the abundance of consecutive fifths, *inter alia*—a new effect in Church music. We shall observe an equally confident

use of the chorus, as one instrument rather than a complex of interlacing parts, in *Sancta Civitas*.

In short, the Mass is an excellently plain example for the study of certain features in Vaughan Williams's mature style. So also is *O vos omnes*, a short but striking motet for 8-part chorus.[1]

THE SHEPHERDS OF THE DELECTABLE MOUNTAINS[2]

A Pastoral Episode founded upon 'The Pilgrim's Progress'. For six solo voices, distant chorus, and small orchestra (1922).

This return to Opera is not, I think, a very happy one. The greatness of *The Pilgrim's Progress* is its wonderful blend of the material and the spiritual worlds, of the ordinary and the ideal, but in the process of selecting, compressing, and dramatizing two episodes from the first Part of Bunyan's 'picaresque' narrative Vaughan Williams has somehow deprived the work of its intensely human appeal, leaving only the allegorical meaning—the adventure of the soul—for which a stage-setting is surely inappropriate. Further, it is difficult to withhold critical comment upon some of the words which the composer (or whoever has written the 'book') has thought suitable to the occasion; for example, the First Shepherd's *Here the air is very sweet and pleasant*, and other such pretty-pretty sentiments. Such disbeliefs could easily be suspended by an all-absorbing musical interest, as the Operas of Mozart, Wagner, and perhaps Schubert, have shown. But in spite of the presence of a number of *leit-motifs*, the musical development is too restrained to be convincing

[1] Curwen. [2] Oxford University Press.

in itself. There are, however, certain fine passages, and a general delicacy of musical feeling, which command our attention.

The orchestra is an intimate one. The burden of the day falls upon strings (with plenty of work for a solo-quartet), flutes, and oboes. But plainness of means has always been congenial to Vaughan Williams. The musical beauty, for instance, of the passage I have stigmatized as pretty-pretty, from the literary point of view, is a worthy counterpart of that wonderful nature-poem, the opening to *Götterdämmerung*, Act III, which it strangely but not unfittingly resembles in general rhythm and colour. Observe, too, the characteristic employment of the solo-viola, which by its solo-delivery of a 'clue theme' in the austere Dorian mode, at the beginning and end of the work, sets its seal on the introspective tone of the whole Opera (cf. the first movement of the Phantasy Quintet). Even more characteristic is the use of the distant chorus and orchestra (trumpets, harp, and bells). Whereas in the Finale of *A Sea Symphony* the distant choir coloured an isolated episode in a long series of adventures, here it illustrates the crowning point of a similarly critical journey, and the glimpse of the World Beyond is expanded. The fact that neither the trumpets nor the double chorus which blends its canon with theirs have been heard before, emphasizes the idea of a sound never yet expressed.

The climax to the Opera is, in fact, an impressive moment. It is inspired less, it seems, by the fulsome narrative which Bunyan has written for the occasion than by the sublime reticence of the famous description, at the end of the second part of the book, of the passing of Mr. Valiant-for-truth. 'So he passed over,

and all the trumpets sounded for him on the other side.' Nothing could be simpler, and nothing could be more stirring to the imagination. It is useless to quote from the musical score, plain as it is: the whole effect must be felt in its actual setting and context.

One technical note. The prominence of the sequences of $\frac{6}{4}$ chords in the bass, moving independently of the melodic line (as in the Pastoral Symphony), is notable owing to its discontinuance in *Sancta Civitas*, on the whole. The second *On Wenlock Edge* chord is used at the critical moment when Pilgrim appears to be sinking.

SANCTA CIVITAS[1]

An Oratorio for Tenor and Baritone Soli, Chorus, Semi-chorus, Distant Chorus, and Orchestra. Words from 'The Revelation' (1925).

In matters of ultimate conviction, knowledge is impossible. We must (in the words of Dean Inge) 'make up our mind to stand or fall by the noblest *hypothesis*'. But the composer may help us to accept such a hypothesis by proving its satisfactory character in a manner agreeable to the unconscious and deeper instincts, if not also to the intellect.

This, to judge from his introductory quotation from the *Phaedo* of Plato (114D), is the spirit in which Vaughan Williams embarked upon a setting of those final chapters of *The Revelation* in which the writer makes a supreme attempt to present the world invisible as a spiritual certainty. In the words of Socrates, 'We may well let the music of such beliefs steal upon our spirits'. Once again, Vaughan Williams has found matter into which he could pour all the breadth and

[1] Curwen.

depth of his musical experience. If his handling is less confident than Handel's treatment of the same material, he speaks with a modesty of utterance which is no less convincing in its own way, perhaps actually more convincing to the mind of the twentieth century, which deprecates uncritical assertion. There is, in short, a vital quality about *Sancta Civitas* which places it, at any rate, beside the Mass in D and all the other works of splendid conception but imperfect achievement. As such, it is entitled to a full examination.

The work falls into three sections, the words of which are taken from *The Revelation* as follows:

(*a*) XIX. 1, 5–9, 11–12, 14–17, 19, 21; (*b*) XVIII. 2, 10, 9, 11, 14, 16, 18–23, 2; (*c*) XXI. 1–2, 11–12, 21–3, 25–6; VII. 15–17; XXII. 1–2, 4–5; the *Sanctus* from the English Communion Service; XXII. 20, 16, 20 (References inclusive).

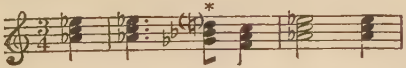
An examination of the full text from Chapter XVIII onwards will indicate that Vaughan Williams, in transposing Chapters XVIII and XIX and omitting XX, has severed the original connexion of thought, viz. that the fall of Babylon (i. e. the Roman Empire?) will lead *to* the ultimate triumph of the Christian Faith over the 'evil' powers, the Judgement of whom (XX. 12–end) will signify the rise of a new and Christian order of things. The musical design is correspondingly loose, the connexion between the three main sections being of the slenderest. It may also be noted that the first section, which follows the text the most nearly, is the closest knit musically. Similarly, the last section, which contains matter from at least two Visions, embodies an extraordinary amount of musical material, nearly all new. In short, it cannot be said that the composer's treatment of the words has made for the happy proportions which we observed in *A Sea Symphony*. But once

again Vaughan Williams has concentrated on the worth of the matter rather than on the neatness of the manner.

The orchestra is very similar to that of the Pastoral Symphony. There is a double-bassoon and no bass-clarinet. One of the three trumpets plays with the distant choir, which is 'of boys' voices if possible'. The percussion includes a part for the piano, at the final climax. The interest of the work is primarily, I think, vocal. The interplay of chorus, semi-chorus, distant chorus, and baritone solo, is original. The composer's use of the distant chorus, already noticed previously (pp. 24 and 71), here attains its full significance, as a feature of the general expression, like the highest choir in *Parsifal*. The thought of *Sancta Civitas* starts in heaven, and in heaven it remains. Thus, a kind of progressive unearthliness (or shall I say 'other-worldliness'?) may be traced in the development of this distant-sound device from the incidental to the characteristic. In every instance there are no men's voices: with the ordinary mixed choir the chances of an absolute blend of tone, so necessary to the purity of effect intended, are too small.

As I have hinted, there are no leading themes in this Oratorio. *The Revelation* is too didactic to be lyrical as a whole, and *Sancta Civitas* is held together, not by the interweaving into the general design of one or two notable lines of melody, but rather by the continual predominance of certain flashes of harmonic colour, intended, presumably, to convey the spiritual state of one who sees heaven opened as if it were the door of his own home. It may be academic to insist on a melodic basis for every musical design that is or will be, just as it may be academic to insist on a clear 'line' in every visual design, but it is fair, in my judgement, to lay it down

in advance that a design in which harmonic colour is the unifying feature is doomed to be ineffective and probably tiresome. And I feel that the prevalence in *Sancta Civitas* of two or three striking chords ultimately confines the expression more than it enriches it. (Cf. anything Scriabin ever wrote.) But in order that every reader may hear the predominance of these chords, and judge for himself, I proceed to details. The two principal chords, it is interesting to note, are already familiar to those who with the writer have followed Vaughan Williams's harmonic development from *On Wenlock Edge* onwards. The first chord—on which the short instrumental prologue and epilogue, and many characteristic passages in the middle or 'Babylon' section, are based—is simply the second *On Wenlock Edge* chord, respaced, usually with one note added, the major sixth above the bass. The second noticeable chord is the first and characteristic chord of the opening Subject in the *Allegro* of *A London Symphony*, respaced. This chord is inevitably the most striking one in the sequence of triads sung from time to time by the distant choir (cf. *The Vagabond*),



but whereas the key-note here is A flat, the key-note in most instances is not a tone but a major third above the bass of the chord.

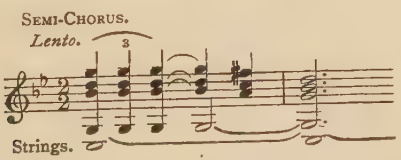
The initial development of the first of these two prominent chords means, at first, nothing but unintelligibility and uncertainty (as it may well be intended to mean), but as the baritone solo, semi-chorus, and chorus creep in, *pp*, on the same unchanging basis, and the whole body of choral and orchestral tone gathers in

strength, we begin to feel the thrill of the imagination taking flight. Then the composer builds on the more fundamental discordance of the second chord, and thenceforward this chord takes command of the situation and, with the increasing shimmer of consecutive triads in the orchestra, brings the music swiftly to a tremendous climax at the words *For the Lord God omnipotent reigneth* (tremendous, provided that the top sopranos can hit high B with both conviction and accuracy, which is a very doubtful proposition). Soon afterwards a return to the harmony of humble uncertainty, as we may considerately name it, introduces a new picture, that of the horse and his rider (a mystical symbol common, I am told, to many religions besides that of John).[1] The music from this point to the end of the first part of the work appears to have been written at white heat. The inscrutability of the mysterious Figure, 'who had a name written that no one knew, but he himself', is conveyed partly by the furious irregularity of the rhythm, and partly by the lightning suddenness with which two chordal transitions are made. The first, represented by the chords of B flat minor and G major in either order, was exhibited in an absolutely opposite light in the Pastoral Symphony, as the basis of the supremely contemplative cadence of the first movement (thus showing the importance of rhythm in the creation of a harmonic effect). The second notable sequence, in which the second and third chords are more usually major,

[1] 'The unrelenting lines of this reminded me somehow of Dürer's Four Horsemen in the "Geheime Offenbarung Johannis"' (Mr. Fox-Strangways, in *The Observer*).

is less flashy than the previous one, and comparatively diatonic in feeling. In either sequence, consecutive triads are used with a freedom of which we noted the anticipation in the Mass. This characteristically simple manner of conveying fundamentals reaches its climax (I had almost said its apotheosis) at the utterance by the chorus of the ' name written ', *King of Kings and Lord of Lords*—the plainness of the expression being underlined by the use of the side-drum as the main orchestral accompaniment, while the use of the Pastoral Symphony scale adds the right touch of mysterious splendour.

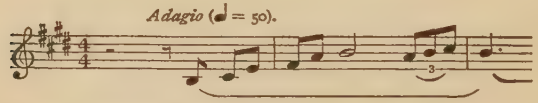
As the imagination of the writer proceeds to the rather lurid portrayal of the war of the kings of the earth ' against him that sat upon the horse ', we return to the development of the *London Symphony* chord, in a manner quite reminiscent of that Symphony (with another high B for the sopranos thrown in), and this is the basis of a new *motif*, illustrating the lament over the fall of ' Babylon ', with which the middle section of the Oratorio is concerned:

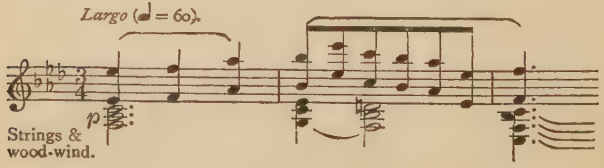


The other feature of this section is, as has previously been stated, the *On Wenlock Edge* chord. Musically I find the interlude wearisome as a whole; and there is no doubt that the original train of thought has been reversed.

The transition to the third Vision is similar in construction and studied plainness of manner to the climax of *The Shepherds of the Delectable Mountains*, but not

so thrilling; the imagination simply takes breath before the supreme flight (this, at least, is how it impresses me). The bass of an unresolved discord, the *On Wenlock Edge* chord, is held by the bass-strings, until over it a solo-violin plays a simple pentatonic strain,



the bass changing from A flat to its enharmonic equivalent, G sharp. When it has moved up to C sharp, the chorus start whispering their mystical prediction of ' a new heaven and a new earth ', the harmony at first resembling the end of the Introduction to *A London Symphony* but soon giving place to something appropriately new. It seems that the composer has sought to illustrate the conception of a new universe by the deliberate introduction, not only of new melodies, but also of new types of melody—in plain terms, of new scales. After a hint of the major scale, given in the violin solo, the harmony changes to that of the rarely used Phrygian mode (final, C sharp); then it becomes primarily chromatic or atonal, the consecutive $\frac{6}{4}$ chords adding to the effect of a general dissolution of all that before was regarded as final and established; the next choice falls upon the Dorian mode, as the basis of this beautifully curved refrain (final, F), given out by the violins and flutes:

Following on the development of this (when the words revert to Chapter VII), F continues to be the final of a scale characterized by a major third, an augmented fourth and a minor seventh, and identical with the basis of the distant choir *motif* already quoted. Finally, as the former Vision is resumed (Chapter XXII), an entirely original scale is the foundation of a wonderfully simple melody, announced by four contraltos from the Semi-chorus, and—after a recapitulation of the violin solo and derivative bars—of the cadence preceding the *Sanctus*.

This academic method of detailing this remarkable series of episodes has been chosen because it is the clearest way of defining the process by which the expansion of whole new universes is suggested to the mind, in rapid succession, by the music. The spiritual effect of the whole can only be realized in actual performance.

The *Sanctus* is begun by the distant choir, whose refrain is now modified to a succession of mainly $\frac{6}{4}$ chords and incorporated in the general scheme by the Semi-chorus and Chorus. Other features of the *Sanctus* are the second principal chord of the Oratorio, detailed above (see p. 75), and the plain sequences of triads such as were heard in the Vision of the rider upon the horse; so that there is an air of recapitulation about this part of the final section. But I have already suggested that there is too little relation between the final section, as a whole, and the rest of the work.

Finally, however, we return to the opening bars, as the supreme vision recedes, and the burning imagination of the writer sinks down to the humble approach with which he had entered the heavenly field. The tenor solo is heard for a moment, uttering the mysterious *Behold I come quickly*; these four bars

are his only appearance. The chorus answer him with the final words of committal, using a melodic line strangely (but not inappropriately) reminiscent of *Toward the Unknown Region*, the first significant record of the composer's spiritual experience. In a similar mood of 'recollection', the last bars—bass-strings *niente*—echo the conclusion of *A Sea Symphony*. In matters of ultimate conviction, even music can only maintain a final reserve.

MISCELLANEOUS

It is not likely that any of the large and mature works, detailed in the last two-thirds of this book, will receive the number of performances necessary to its just appreciation by the average listener. I therefore conclude these introductory notes on Vaughan Williams's music with a mention of a few of the smaller types of mature work, which will probably be much quicker in winning general familiarity.

Of the songs I will name *The Water-mill*[1] because it is widely sung and admired, not because I consider it a good piece of work; indeed, it appears to me a most unnecessary setting of Fredegonde Shove's poem, charming as it is. On the other hand, there is a wonderfully tempered metal behind the plain lines—characteristically plain, may I observe for the last time?—of *A Clear Midnight*,[1] the second of three songs set to words by Walt Whitman, whose connexion with Vaughan Williams has always been a happy one.

The Suite for piano,[2] again, is plain to a degree,

[1] Oxford University Press.

[2] Stainer & Bell. There is also an arrangement for string orchestra (the 'Charterhouse' Suite).

without being very easy to play, but it contains an attractive *Quick Dance* and a lovely *Slow Air*.

Of the three Preludes on Welsh hymn-tunes, for the organ,[1] the first has a simple dignity which places it in line with the splendid creations of Parry for the instrument; the second has a very pleasant flow about it; the third has sharp and almost jagged outlines, and somehow I never really enjoy playing it.

A SUMMARY

Sancta Civitas, in spite of a certain monotony of style, shows no signs of any general diminution of creative energy or technical mastery, and I see no reason why it should not be followed up in the next ten years by, let us say, a new and more mature Choral Symphony, the composer's unique experiment in that direction having recently been succeeded by a remarkable First Choral Symphony from the writer nearest him in style and character, Gustav Holst. Vaughan Williams has, however, reached a point at which one may reasonably summarize his achievements up to date, and consider where his influence on the music of the future is likely to be felt.

First, he has made his material contribution to the world's music. By helping to break down the tyranny of the bar-line, he has enlarged our conception of rhythm. By his convincing use of new scales, or of old ones in combination, he has opened up a fresh field of melody[2] and harmony which is by no means com-

[1] Stainer & Bell.

[2] The expressiveness of the semitone has always been an important feature in the work of all composers from Byrd to Wagner. In Vaughan Williams's melodic lines, as in those of Debussy, the semitone is extraordinarily rare—hence, again, a certain bluntness.

pletely explored. His orchestration has neither the subtle grace of Mozart nor the rich vitality of Wagner, but it may well be imitated for its remarkable spaciousness and, on the other hand, for its intimate handling of certain instruments—notably the violin and viola, as solo-instruments in an orchestral design, and the trumpet, as an instrument of subtlety as well as of power. Further, Vaughan Williams has written a new chapter in choral expression, and the first chapter in the writing of Choral Symphonies. His general sense of design is, we have seen, not always convincing; and he has shown a certain tendency to associate his music with something outside it. Yet he has given a clear support to the hypothesis shared by all the masters of orchestral expression (from Haydn to Elgar), that the symphonic form is a good foundation to build upon, provided that the structural details are in keeping with the working material.

But his procedure in these technical matters, his fondness for certain manners and topics of speech which I have summarized in the Introduction as English, his numerous mystical works—all these are only the outward signs of his real influence, which will lie in his consistent determination to go to the root of the matter. At almost every point he has reverted to first principles, like all the great creative minds of history. He has discovered new types of rhythm and melody by deliberately going for his material to the period at which rhythm and mode were in the melting-pot. He has used such material in a direct, uncompromising way not, like Handel, in order that he might be immediately understood, but because, like Beethoven, he felt that a fundamental experience was best symbolized by that which is, in the deepest sense, natural.

By this unflinching acceptance of his artistic responsibilities Vaughan Williams has seldom turned from those feelings which do us credit. That is why his music never fails to be impressive, whether you like it or not. And if you like it, you will feel, with the Editor of *Music and Letters*,

> Whose music is there of modern Englishmen, after Parry's, that we want to use on the great occasions of life except this? There is something in that noble climax of *Toward the Unknown Region*, in that basic rock over which the scum and froth of a great city float in the first movement of the *London Symphony*, in the surge of melodies in the first movement of the *Sea Symphony*, in the steadfast purpose of the many songs . . . there is in these something that, like a course of Browning, corrects the Tennyson in us, and learned or unlearned, *invigorates us all.*[1]

[1] *Music and Letters*, April 1920. The final italics are mine.

LIST OF GRAMOPHONE RECORDS

'For all the Saints' (H.M.V., Columbia).

'Silent noon', from *The House of Life* (Columbia).

Songs of Travel. 'The Vagabond' (H.M.V., Vocalion).
'The Roadside Fire' (Columbia, Vocalion).
'Bright is the ring of words' (Columbia).

'Linden Lea' (H.M.V., Columbia, Vocalion).

Overture to *The Wasps* (Vocalion).

On Wenlock Edge. The complete cycle (Columbia).

Hugh the Drover. A comprehensive selection (H.M.V.).

A London Symphony. Complete (Columbia).

Ballet Suite, *Old King Cole* (Vocalion).

Folk-song Arrangements (H.M.V.).

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